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Characteristics of Quality Teachers:

Students' Perspectives in High Performing Schools

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Characteristics of Quality Teachers:

Students' Perspectives in High Performing Schools

by

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DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated in memory of my mother,

Aurora Carrillo de Rodriguez, who inspired me to be a strong woman.

To my dear daughter, Valeria, who has taught me to be

a better human being and how to enjoy life.

To my cousin, Dori, my guardian angel,

whose love, generosity, and wisdom have guided me.

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Characteristics of Quality Teachers: Students' Perspectives in High Performing Schools

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This study focuses on students' perceptions of the characteristics of quality teachers. A total of 448 students enrolled in high performing schools in 10 mostly urban school districts participated in focus group interviews during which groups of students in elementary, middle school, and high school were presented with the question, "What are the characteristics of quality teachers?" Student responses were recorded and analyzed using the three steps of Grounded Theory. Six characteristics of quality teachers emerged from the data. Student responses for each subgroup (elementary, middle school, and high school) were analyzed to determine the prevalence of each emergent characteristic among and between subgroups; each characteristic was then compared between subgroups to isolate intersecting and salient characteristics. Emergent characteristics were cross referenced to existing research on quality teacher traits to identify congruent as well as emergent descriptions of quality teachers. The goal of this study was to illuminate students' voices by bringing their perspectives into the discourse of what constitutes quality teaching.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

"Teaching is at the heart of education, and the single most important action the nation can take to improve schools is to strengthen teaching" (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2000, p.6).

"The core of education is teaching and learning, and the teaching and learning connection works best when we have effective teachers working with students every day" (Stronge, 2006, p. 1).

Introduction

The impact that great teachers have on each of their students is monumental and far-reaching. In times past, present, and to come, there was, is, and will be need for those special individuals who touch the lives of their students—of those special individuals whose students leave their classrooms brighter, more confident, and eager to learn and demonstrate their knowledge. Some of these individuals seem to have an innate talent for teaching, for making their students *understand.* Others just work really hard and polish their skill until it shines. These individuals have something to teach us, in and out of the classroom.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), emphasized the importance of teacher quality in improving student achievement. As a result, Title II, Part A—The Improving Teacher Quality State Grant Program, provides nearly $3 billion a year to the

states (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2004). These funds can be used to prepare, train, and recruit highly qualified teachers and principals.

An underlying premise of this research study is that there exists valuable information in the study of the effective teachers of today—the teachers who can deliver quality teaching to their students, despite challenges. Determining the characteristics that set these teachers apart lends insight into the heart of what makes a quality teacher and may elicit information that will aid in the preparation and training of current and future teachers. If provided with the qualities that set effective teachers apart, colleges and universities could include the information in the curriculum to-be teachers are taught by. School districts could apply the information to their recruiting and interview processes to notice the individuals who demonstrate the characteristics. Districts could also incorporate the information into teacher evaluation. Staff development programs could include as part of training activities that teach teachers to exhibit the characteristics. Teachers could be inspired to embody the characteristics of quality teachers.

Purpose of the Chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of a research study that intends to discover and analyze the characteristics of quality teachers, specifically as perceived by K–12 students who are enrolled in high performing, mostly urban school districts. This chapter will provide a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions that will be the focus of the study. Second, the chapter will briefly describe the methodology, the limitations, and the assumptions related to the

study. The chapter will conclude with the significance of the study. A definition of terms is available for reference following the research study.

Statement of the Problem

> A statement by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development addressed a question of why people are leaving the cities, "Two answers most commonly cited are poor quality of urban schools and the relatively high rates of urban crime" (State of the Cities Report from the U.S. Housing and Urban Development, 1998, in Urban Education, 1999, p.2).

This study focuses primarily on urban schools and districts with the goal of uncovering information that can be applied to more effectively recruit, prepare, and train teachers of urban schools and districts. The following sections explain the specific problems faced by urban schools and teachers.

Urban School Challenges and Statistics

Urban districts face unique challenges in meeting the needs of their diverse group of students. There are 16,850 public schools districts in the United States; 100 of those districts, most of which exist in urban areas, serve approximately 23 percent of the country's students, 40 percent of the country's minority students, and 30 percent of the country's economically disadvantaged students (Council of the Great City Schools [CGCS]). These urban districts that serve a significant percentage of the country's

minority and economically disadvantaged students and must overcome immense obstacles in order to meet the needs of each of their students.

Driven by the concern that schools were failing their students, the Council of the Great City Schools embarked on an effort to understand student achievement patterns in large urban school districts and to develop ideas for how more districts can raise achievement (CGCS). In a report entitled *The Challenge of Location and Poverty* (1996), the Council of the Great City Schools indicated that students and teachers in urban schools have greater challenges to overcome in a number of areas compared to their suburban and rural counterparts, even when the higher concentration of poverty in urban areas is considered (Lippman, L., Burns, S., McArthur, E., & NCES). Likewise, CGCS released the report *Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement* (Snipes, J., Doolittle, F., Herlihy, J. 2002) citing challenges that urban school districts must address in order to meet the needs of their students; included were:

- unsatisfactory academic achievement,
- inexperienced teaching staff,
- political conflict,
- lack of expectations and demanding curriculum,
- high student mobility, and
- unsatisfactory business operations (pp. 15–17).

The same report documented that achievement for minority and disadvantaged students was noticeably below that of Anglo and more affluent students, and the differences by ethnicity and economic status increased as students aged (Snipes, J.,

Doolittle, F., Herlihy, J. 2002, p. 19). Education Week's Quality Counts (1998) reports that academic performance is worst in urban schools where the majority of the students are poor.

Many city children face obstacles that interfere with learning. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the "list is long and includes health, family, economic, and social factors that extend well beyond the classroom." As compared with rural and suburban children, urban students are:

- more likely to be exposed to safety and health risks and less likely to receive proper regular medical care.
- less likely to attend schools with gifted and talented programs and more likely to be identified as having learning and emotional disabilities.
- more likely to live with only one parent, and their parents tend to be less educated than parents of children in the suburbs.
- less likely to have access to computers and the Internet, but watch more television than children in suburban or rural areas (NCES, 1996, in Boss, Winter 1999, Lessons from the Cities section).

Although *Beating the Odds IV* (a city-by-city analysis of student performance and achievement gaps on state assessments), released by the Council of the Great City Schools in March of 2006, indicates students in urban school districts have made steady gains in the past four years, the need for highly-qualified, effective teachers in urban school districts remains.

Star Teachers

Of all the teachers who work with the seven million diverse, low-income, urban students in the 120 largest school districts in the United States, approximately 8 percent are considered to be "star teachers." The term star teacher designates teachers who are so effective that the challenges of working in urban schools do not prevent them from being successful (Haberman, 1995, 1999, 2004). M. Haberman describes the characteristics that set them apart (1995, 2004):

- their persistence,
- their physical and emotional stamina,
- their caring relationships with students,
- their commitment to acknowledging and appreciating student effort,
- their willingness to admit mistakes,
- their focus on in-depth learning,
- their ability to translate theory and research into practice,
- their commitment to inclusion, and
- their organizational skills.

Star teachers also:

- protect students' learning time,
- cope with bureaucracy,
- create student ownership,
- engage parents and caregivers as partners in the student learning, and
- support accountability for at-risk students' learning (1995, pp. 29–55).

This discussion of star teachers and the characteristics that set them apart and enable them to be effective despite challenges bears significance. These characteristics, when known, can be applied in the preparation, training, and evaluation of teachers who will aspire to demonstrate the qualities of effective teachers, making them, in turn, more effective. The consideration of the characteristics of quality teachers is an important aspect of the research process when the goal is to improve the academic achievement of students and ensure that teachers are prepared to meet the diverse and changing needs of students and schools.

Purpose of the Study

The intent of this research study is to review existing literature pertaining to the characteristics of quality teachers, to augment the existing research by adding the student voice and perspective to the discourse, and to analyze the information obtained to uncover potential pedagogical implications regarding the preparation, training, and evaluation of teachers. This study investigates the characteristics of quality teachers as perceived by students, K–12. The students of urban schools are given predominate focus, based on the challenges previously discussed. This study further focuses on the perspectives of students who are enrolled in high performing schools, based on the assumption that the higher-performing schools are more likely the schools with a greater concentration of effective teachers. Stronge explains, "The core of education is teaching and learning, and the teaching and learning connection works best when we have effective teachers working with students every day" (2006, p. 1). For the purpose of this

study, students of high performing schools were studied; however it is possible that a number of other factors contribute to the schools' academic performance.

To Review Existing Research for Characteristics of Quality Teachers

Recent political imperatives have pushed the issue of teacher quality to the top of the reform agenda in U.S. education (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001). The enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 triggered efforts throughout the United States to improve teacher quality. As a result, there currently exists a wealth of information pertaining to quality teachers, their characteristics, and teacher-evaluation systems. Chapter II of this study will provide a detailed examination of existing research on the characteristics of quality teachers and a thorough discussion of teacher evaluation techniques and systems. What follows is a highlight of existing research and literature pertaining to quality teachers.

Researchers have found that quality teachers have a positive impact on student academic performance and help close the achievement gap. Furthermore, Darling-Hammond (Teacher Quality, 2000) found that quality teaching was fundamental to student learning and critical for the success of educational reform efforts. When teachers improve their teaching, students are the beneficiaries. If we are to see improvement of student performance in the classroom, especially in urban settings, we must focus on teacher quality and the preparation of future teachers.

Quality teaching has been defined as "teaching that maximizes learning for all students" (Glatton & Fox, 1996, p. 1, in Stroot, et. al, Successful, 1998). Teaching entails

engaging students as active learners to induce positive, comprehensive changes in preexisting knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Comprehensive changes and growth are achieved by teachers who are able to build on learners' experiences, abilities, interest, motivation, and skills (Stroot, et al., 1998). Therefore, quality teachers must not only master the basic skills of teaching but possess the ability to continuously adjust their teaching strategies to meet the diverse and changing needs of their students.

In a literature review, *Teacher Characteristics and Student Achievement Gains: A Review, by Wayne & Youngs*, (2003), the authors report the results of a meta-analysis in which they examined several national databases to review teacher quality. They identified four characteristics important to teacher quality: the ratings of teachers' colleges, test scores, course taking and degrees, and certification status. The study has numerous implications not only for policymakers, but for institutions of higher education and school districts that are the recipients of teachers.

With the passage of the No Child Left behind Act (2001) and its emphasis on highly qualified teachers, according to Stronge, "a premium must be placed on high quality teacher evaluation systems" (2006, p. 2). Stronge asks, "Why does teacher evaluation matter?" He answers, "Regardless of how well a program is designed, it is only as effective as the people who implement it" (Stronge, 1993, in Stronge, 2006, p. 2). Furthermore, he asserts that "the basic needs in a quality teacher evaluation system are for a fair and effective evaluation based on performance and designed to encourage improvements in both the teacher and the school" (Stronge, 2006 p. 2).

To Augment Existing Research by Including the Student Voice

Follman (1992) observed that "no other individual or group has [the] breadth, depth, or length of experience with the teacher…[and]…teachers look to their students rather than to outside sources for indications of their performance" (Follman 1992, in Stronge, 2006, p. 137). The students, "as direct recipients of the teaching-learning process, are the major clients of teachers, they are in the key position to provide information about teacher effectiveness" (Stronge, 2006, p. 135). More importantly, "students are the only ones of the teacher's clients who have direct knowledge about classroom practices on a regular basis" (p. 137).

Current research on teacher quality is largely based on the perspectives of scholars, economists, legislators (NCLB, 2001), and teachers (Harrell, 2004). Scholars focusing on students' peer cultures have demonstrated the significance of investigating the perspectives of students—who bring experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and cultural knowledge that shape the organization of schools (Cazden, 1988). While studies focus on teacher quality and its definition, few present the characteristics of quality teachers that include the student voice. Because teachers interact with students on a daily basis and quality teachers impact students' academic performance, it is important to consider the students' input into the discussion of what makes a quality teacher. Attention should be paid to the student perspective.

Current trends in determining what constitutes a quality teacher call for a robust teacher evaluation program—one that includes the students' perspectives. Previous research also indicated that by systematically comparing data from three sources,

principals can help teachers identify their strengths and weaknesses. These three sources of data are classroom observation, teacher self-analysis, and student descriptions of teaching practices (Harris, 1987). In addition is the opinion of Stronge, "One of the arguments for including students as evaluators is that they are the primary consumers of the teacher's services" (Stronge, 2006, p. 135).

However, characteristics of quality teachers as perceived by K–12 students have not been the focus of extensive research. It is important to include in the research how students perceive quality teachers. As urban schools become increasingly diverse, implications for educating urban students arise which may affect teacher education, professional development, instructional planning, assessment and practices, all of which should be directly linked to the needs of students. By examining students' perceptions of the characteristics of quality teachers, the results of this study may guide educational leaders in their efforts to prepare, train, and evaluate teachers of urban schools. In addition, the information can help teachers understand how students perceive them and to develop the necessary skills to address the academic needs of all students.

This research study will examine the characteristics of quality teachers as perceived by K–12 students in high performing, mostly urban schools. By examining the students' perspective, their voices will be heard, and their account of what makes a quality teacher will inform researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.

Research Questions

The following research questions are the focus of this study:

1. What are the perceived characteristics of quality teachers according to elementary students?
2. What are the perceived characteristics of quality teachers according to middle school students?
3. What are the perceived characteristics of quality teachers according to high school students?

Included in the next sections are descriptions of the data, methodology and procedures that were employed to answer to the research questions.

Data

The study used data collected by the Stupski Foundation, a non-profit organization founded by Joyce and Larry Stupski in 1996. The goal of the foundation is "to help ensure all children in America, regardless of race or income, have access to a high quality education" (Stupski Foundation, 2006). The Stupski Foundation formed a partnership with 10 large, predominantly urban school districts across the nation with diverse populations of students. During a week long organizational assessment of the 10 school districts, a team of assessors conducted focus group interviews with K–12 students in their schools. The researcher of this study worked as a member of the Stupski team conducting the interviews. Five interview questions were posed, one of which was "What are the characteristics of quality teachers?" Student responses were hand recorded by the Stupski team of assessors.

This study analyzed the portion of the data collected by the Stupski Foundation team that pertains to the K–12 students' perceptions of the characteristics of quality teachers. In order to provide a contextual background for the districts where the data were collected, this study also analyzed student achievement and demographic information, including the ethnic breakdown of students, economic status, school characteristics, and district profiles.

Methodology

This study employed grounded theory as the theoretical framework. Grounded theory, a form of qualitative inquiry research, is an inductive, theory discovery methodology that allows the researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Furthermore, grounded theory is an interactional method of theory building. It involves making comparisons and asking questions of the data. It is sometimes called the constant comparative method of analysis. Strauss and Corbin (1990) identify three steps in the grounded theory of analytic process:

Step 1: *Open coding* is the part of the analysis that pertains specifically to naming and categorizing phenomena through close examination of the data;

Step 2: *Axial coding* is the part of the analytic process in which the researcher puts the parts of the data identified and separated in open coding back together to make connections between categories; and

Step 3: *Selective coding* involves the process of selecting one main core category (the story line) and relating the other categories to it. Mertens described this step by saying, "You validate the hypothesized relationships with the data available to you and fill in the categories that need further refinement and development" (1998, p. 171).

The following sections describe the limitations and assumptions that are indicative of the quality measures related to this research study.

Limitations

The following are potential limitations to this study:

1. The results of the study may not be generalized to other school districts due to the sampling method employed in this study.
2. The findings of this research study can be expected to apply specifically to the 10 partner school districts whose students participated in the focus interviews.
3. Because interviews were not recorded, the accuracy of the findings of this study are limited to the accuracy of the team of assessors' written record of the students' responses.
4. The study will focus on the perceptions of the students only. It will not include the teachers' perceptions or those of other personnel in the districts.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made regarding this study:

1. It is assumed the existing data were accurately recorded by the team members who interviewed the K–12 students in the 10 school districts.
2. It is assumed the students interviewed gave honest responses about their perceptions on characteristics of quality teachers.

Significance of the Study

Gaining insight into students' beliefs about the characteristics of quality teachers may hold tremendous value in the planning of school reform. The goal of illuminating students' voices will serve not only to add to the current discourse, but also to inform educators about their assumptions and understanding of quality teachers. Because current research on the characteristics of quality teachers predominantly exists from the perspectives of teachers, scholars, economists, and policymakers, this study intends to augment existing research by addressing the perspectives of students, from kindergarteners to seniors in high school.

The knowledge and insight of the students in large, urban school districts throughout the nation may have potential pedagogical implications for teachers, teacher preparation institutions, professional development specialists, and policymakers. In addition, understanding student perceptions can augment the knowledge base for not only the teachers, but district leaders who are responsible for ensuring that all teachers are

highly qualified, as required by NCLB (2001). This study will inform urban school districts about what students view as characteristics of quality teachers. This study vocalizes K–12 students' perceptions of the characteristics of quality teachers.

Summary of Chapter I

Chapter I introduced the need to identify the characteristics of quality teachers in urban school districts as perceived by the students. A statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, and research questions were presented. Furthermore, chapter I included a summary of the methodology, limitations and assumptions related to the study. Finally, chapter I offered a statement of the significance of the study.

Chapter II will provide a review of the research and literature concerning the characteristics of quality teachers and their practices as well as a review of the history and current perspectives on teacher evaluation.

Chapter III will present a detailed explanation of the data, sampling method and population, data collection instruments and protocols, and methodology. Chapter IV will present the results of the study. Chapter V will address the findings and implications for theory, practice, and policy review.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the literature associated with the areas of research related to quality teachers. This chapter is divided into two sections. The overview section contains a brief history of teacher certification standards as well as a history of school reform and the concepts of quality teachers. The section ends with federal mandates of Title II—The Improving Teacher Quality State Grant Program. The second section of the chapter provides a review of existing research pertaining to characteristics of quality teachers and concludes with a review of the history of and current perspectives on teacher evaluation.

Overview

History of Teacher Certification Standards

The concept of effective teaching has changed over the years. For most of the 20th century, teacher candidates were eligible for certification if they completed a state-approved teacher preparation program. The nature of the teacher preparation was largely influenced by the needs of their respective states (Wayne & Youngs, 2003). This trend changed in the 1980's as several states implemented performance assessments for beginning teachers. "Many of these assessments were based on process-product research on teaching and focused on a uniform set of teaching behaviors regardless of content or

grade level taught;" however in the last decade, many states have adopted standards from the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (Wayne & Youngs, 2003, p. 90).

History of School Reform—What Makes Quality Teachers

Investigations of what attributes make the most effective teachers have a long history, beginning in the early 1920's when general psychological findings and theories were used to develop prescriptions for teaching practices. Specific practices were formulated based on controlled studies of learning strategies, behavior modification techniques, and programmed instruction. Subsequently, attention focused more closely on teacher attributes (such as beliefs, knowledge, and personality traits) and knowledge as predictors of on-the-job success (Lucas, 1999).

Major events that precipitated educational reforms affecting teacher quality began with the Soviet Union's launching of the Sputnik in 1975. In response to that event, reports on education were generated throughout the 1980's. One such report that had lasting impact was *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform.* The report declared that the United States is "a nation at risk… whose educational foundations…are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our future as a nation and as a people" (A Nation at Risk, in Harrell, 2004, p.1). A few years later, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) was created. Hoping to advance educational reform, President Clinton encouraged all Americans to become involved in the debate over teacher quality and in his 1997 State of the Union Address, issued a "Call

to Action" that included as a priority improving the quality of teachers in every classroom in the country.

Then, in January, 2002, President Bush signed Public Law 107-110, commonly known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. NCLB placed a major emphasis upon the importance of teacher quality in improving student achievement, requiring all states to have a "highly qualified teacher" in every classroom with core subjects being taught. Core subjects are identified as English, reading or language arts, mathematics, science, foreign language, civics and government, economics, art, history and geography (NCLB website, 2006).

Improving Teacher Quality—Federal Mandates

The No Child Left behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), places a major emphasis upon the importance of teacher quality in improving student achievement (Title II, Part A, Policy Guidance, 2004). In accordance with the policy guidance of Title II, Part A, its main purpose is to enable states and school districts to ensure that all students have effective teachers—that is, teachers with the subject-matter knowledge and teaching skills necessary to help all children, regardless of individual learning styles and needs, achieve academic standards. The federal funds allocated through Title II, Part A, are to help local education agencies (LEA) recruit, train, reward, and retain effective teachers. The federal mandates also emphasize the need for LEAs to ensure that teachers of core academic subjects meet certain minimum requirements in order to be effective educators. The requirements to be considered "highly qualified" under Title II , Part A, are that

teachers hold at least a bachelor's degree, be fully certified in their state, and demonstrate competency in the core academic subject area they are teaching (Title II, Part A, policy guidance document, TEA, 2004).

In addition, all states that receive Title II, Part A funds are required to have highly qualified teachers for all core academic subjects. This requirement applies to all public elementary and secondary school teachers who teach a core academic subject and are employed by a local educational agency. When the term "highly qualified teacher" is used with respect to any public elementary or secondary school teacher teaching in a State, it means that the teacher:

1. Has obtained full State teacher certification and does not have certification requirements waived on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis;
2. Holds a minimum of a bachelor's degree; and
3. Has demonstrated subject matter competency in each of the core academic subjects in which the teacher teaches, in a manner determined by the State and in compliance with NCLB (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001).

Individual states are responsible for determining how "experienced teachers," or teachers who are not new to the profession, may be "highly qualified." In Texas, for example, The Texas Education Agency (TEA) is responsible for developing and approving methods for ensuring that teachers have, in addition to a bachelor's degree and full Texas certification, subject matter competency and teaching skills (TEA, 2006). In addition experienced teachers in Texas can demonstrate their competency and skills by:

- passing the appropriate ExCET or TexES subject matter test;
- in the case of secondary school teachers, completing an academic major, graduate degree coursework to an academic major, or advanced certification or credentialing; or
- using the Texas high objective, uniform State standard of evaluation (HOUSE) (TEA, Title II, Part A, Policy Guidance, 2004).

Review—

Existing Research and Literature

Pertaining to Teacher Quality

The concept of teacher quality has evolved with educational reforms. What follows is a chronological summary of existing research and information pertaining to quality teacher characteristics.

—Hanushek, 1992. Sanders, 1998. Sanders and Rivers, 1996—

In earlier research, Hanushek (1992) estimated that the difference between having a good teacher and having a bad teacher can exceed one grade-level equivalent in annual achievement growth. Similarly, Sanders (1998) and Sanders and Rivers (1996) argue that the single most important factor affecting student achievement is teachers, and the effects of teachers on student achievement are both additive and cumulative. Furthermore, they contend that lower-achieving students are the most likely to benefit from increases in teacher effectiveness. These sources of evidence conclude that quality teachers are a critical determinant of student achievement.

—Haberman, 1995—

Haberman (1995), professor of education at the University of Wisconsin, published Star Teachers of Children in Poverty, which contained research he had carried out over many years. In his book he claims to have conducted over one thousand interviews and observations of teachers. By analyzing the data gathered he was able to discern differences between successful teachers and weak teachers. Haberman describes the following functions or characteristics of "star teachers"

- Persistence: "Star teachers believe that is their responsibility to find ways of engaging their students in learning. They describe their jobs to themselves and to others as continuous generation and maintenance of student learning involvement" (p. 22).
- Protecting Learners and Learning: "For star teachers, the ultimate value to be preserved is learning. They constantly seek out capitalizing on problems, questions, discrepant events, current crises, and emergencies. They bring these into the classroom and use them to involve students in learning" (p. 29). Star teachers also interest their children in learning by modeling their own interest in learning.
- Generalizations—Putting ideas into Practice: Star teachers are able to conceive numerous things to do, can verbalize about teaching, can create classrooms where students are active and busy in constructive ways, and at the same time are able to explain what they are learning and why they are learning (p. 41).
- Approach to "At-Risk" Children: Star teachers recognize the impact of the label "at-risk" children and youth; however, these teachers do not blame the student, they focus learning for their students regardless of the student's background (pp. 48–53).

- Professional-Personal Orientation to Students: Star teachers use words like "caring, respect and trust" and have strong relationships with their students; they understand the basic goal of teachers is to connect children with meaningful learning in ways that are interesting to learners (p. 54).
- Fallibility: Star teachers understand they make mistakes and are willing to apologize; they don't criticize a child in public.
- Emotional and Physical Stamina: Physical and emotional stamina is intertwined with enthusiasm for the subject, the activity, and the students' responses to the learning (p. 71).
- Organizational Ability: Star teachers display extraordinary managerial skills. They use the projected method or discovery methods that involve students in active ways; they also make certain their students have sufficient materials, supplies, and equipment to achieve particular learning goals (p. 73).
- Effort not Ability: Star teachers are sensitive to the ages and the school experiences of their students, and they actively and directly teach the concept that trying and making mistakes are normal and desirable activities in learning. They also believe that success is more frequently and closely associated with effort than with chance, connections, or some inherent talent (p. 78).
- You and Me against the Material: Star teachers establish a form of rapport with children that clearly communicates that the teacher and the children are on the same side—"It's us, we together, joined in a common effort against the material." (p. 86).

—Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain, 1998—

In contrast to other measures of quality used by researchers cited in this chapter, Rivkin, Hanushek and Kain (1998) correlate teacher quality with student performance outcomes. They concluded from their analysis of 400,000 students in 3,000 schools that, although school quality, class size, teacher education, and teacher experience are

important determinants of student achievement, the most important predictor of student achievement is teacher quality.

—The National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, 2000—

In the year 2000, the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards issued a statement entitled, "What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do." The paper proposed the five following core propositions:

1. Teachers are committed to students and their learning.
2. Teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to students.
3. Teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning.
4. Teachers think systematically about their practices and learn from experience.
5. Teachers are members of learning communities (NBPTS, 2000, p. 2).

These five propositions represent what the Board considered as fundamental and time-honored values or concepts in teaching, which encompass both technical and interpersonal aspects of the teaching profession (NBPTS, 2000, p. 4).

—Darling-Hammond, 2000—

Linda Darling-Hammond, a leading researcher in teacher quality, says that no other intervention can make the difference that a knowledgeable, skillful teacher can make in the learning process. Furthermore, Darling-Hammond (Teacher Quality, 2000) found that quality teaching was fundamental to student learning and critical for the success of educational reform efforts; she claims, "Successful twenty-first century

schools will be grounded on two very different assumptions: first, that teaching matters, and second that relationships matter" (p. 6). In *Reforming Teacher Preparation and Licensing: Debating the Evidence*, Darling-Hammond (2000) reports that "measures of teacher preparation and certification are by far the strongest correlates of student achievement in reading and mathematics, both before and after controlling for student poverty and language status" (p. 10). She further contends that measures of teacher quality more strongly relate to student achievement than other kinds of educational investments, including class-size reduction, overall spending on education, and teacher salaries.

—Stronge, 2002—

In the book, Qualities of Effective Teachers, Stronge (2002) summarizes research accumulated across several decades to define specific teacher behaviors that contribute to student achievement and other measures of effectiveness. Commonalities highlighted include characteristics of the teacher as an individual, teacher preparation, classroom management, and the way a teacher plans, teaches, and monitors student progress. In his investigation of the prerequisites of effective teachers, Stronge concluded that teachers' scores on verbal ability tests were the only input found to have a direct positive relationship with student achievement. He also found that students taught by teachers with high verbal skills perform better on standardized tests that those students taught by teachers with lower verbal skills. Additional important findings from research related to certification standards, according to Stronge, include:

- "Fully prepared and certified teachers have a greater impact on gains in student learning than do uncertified or provisionally certified teachers, especially with minority populations and in urban areas" (p. 7).
- "Teachers with certification of some kind (standard, alternative, or provisional) tend to have higher achieving students than teachers working without certification" (p. 7).
- "Teachers certified within their field have significantly higher achievement rates among their students than teachers working out-of-field, especially in mathematics" (p. 7).
- "Students perform better when their teachers have majored or minored in the subject area they are teaching" (p. 8).
- "Teachers with more experience tend to show better planning skills, including a more hierarchical and organizational structure in the presentation of their material" (p. 10).
- "Teachers with more than three years of experience are more effective than those with three years or fewer, but these differences seem to level off after five to eight years" (p. 10).

Furthermore, Stronge's research on qualities of effective teachers includes:

- A teacher who is caring;
- A teacher who is understanding;
- A teacher who knows his/her students;
- A teacher who promotes enthusiasm and motivation for learning;
- A teacher who has a dual commitment to personal and student learning;
- A teacher who has a consistent, proactive discipline as the major crux of effective classroom management;
- A teacher who can apply the elements of organization;

- A teacher who can organize instruction in such a manner that allocates the needed time for learning as the central purpose of educational productivity;
- A teacher who communicates high expectations for all students, and
- A teacher who understands the complexity of teaching is reflective of his/her practice and knows how to keep students engaged (pp. 25-44).

In conclusion, "effective teaching is a result of a combination of many factors, including aspects of the teacher's background and ways of interacting with others as well as specific teaching practices" (Stronge, 2002, p. 61).

—Wayne and Youngs, 2003—

In *Teacher Characteristics and Student Achievement Gains: A Review*, an extensive literature review that examines characteristics of effective teachers, Wayne and Youngs (2003) were able to provide evidence of four characteristics relating to teacher quality: (1) ratings of teachers' colleges, (2) test scores, (3) course taking and degrees, and (4) certification status. The summary of their findings is as follows:

Ratings of Teachers' Undergraduate Institutions

Wayne and Youngs determined that some positive relationships existed between the teacher's college rating and student achievement gains. Three research studies were included as a part of the Wayne and Youngs review of teachers' undergraduate institutions (2003).

- Summers and Wolf (1975a, 1997)—The first set of studies was undertaken in Philadelphia during the 1970-1971 school year, using samples of students in the 6^{th}, 8^{th} and 12^{th} grades during that year. School records included scores from

earlier years, so the authors were able to obverse each student's gains over time. The three analyses examined gains from 3rd to 6th grade, 6th to 8th grade, and 9th to 12th grade.

- Murmane and Phillips (1981)—The second study involving college ratings was conducted in Indiana in the early 1970's. This study provided achievement data on several hundred Black elementary school students, mostly from low-income homes.
- Ehrenberg and Brewer (1994)—The third study questioned whether students learn from teachers who attended better-rated undergraduate institutions. The authors used the High School and Beyond (HS & B) data set, which tested a sample of 10th graders in 1980 and then retested them as 12th graders in 1982.
  Wayne and Youngs (2003).

Test Scores

Seven studies of student achievement assessed the importance of teacher's scores on tests of verbal skills and other tests. They were grouped in three categories: (a) studies involving teacher licensure examination scores; (b) subsequent student achievement studies involving tests of teachers' verbal skills; and (c) more recent studies involving other test score measurement. Examined jointly, the seven studies yielded some-what divergent findings: Determinate findings included five positive and two negative.

Degrees and Coursework

Lack of data prevented the researchers from determining whether students learned more from teachers with particular degrees or coursework. The available data sets

contained information on the teachers' degree levels (e.g., bachelors and masters, etc.), and results were mixed.

Certification Status

Only two studies met the standards for the Wayne and Youngs review (2003), both by Goldhaber and Brewer (1997, 2000, in Wayne & Youngs, 2003). In their first study, two certification indicators were tested. They simply asked whether the teacher was certified, without reference to any particular subject and they found that students taking English classes appeared to learn less from English teachers who held certification was considered. The second model used by Goldhaber and Brewer added information about the particular subject in which teachers claimed certifications. The results for English became intermediate, suggesting the earlier negative findings were caused by English teachers holding certification outside of English. This study also included further analysis of certification type compared to mathematics. Goldhaber and Brewer (2001, in Wayne & Youngs, 2003) compared mathematics gains of students whose teachers held standard certification in mathematics with those whose teachers held temporary, provisional, or emergency certification, and found that the teachers in this comparison were equally effective.

—King-Rice, 2003—

A number of researchers have argued that teacher quality is a strong predictor of student performance (King-Rice, 2003). *In Teacher Quality: Understanding the*

Effectiveness of Teacher Attributes, an analysis review that focused on the impact of teacher characteristics on teacher effectiveness, King-Rice (2003) included five broad categories to organize the teacher characteristics assumed to reflect teacher quality. The highlights of the empirical evidence in her review include:

- Teacher experience: in her analysis, King-Rice found a positive effect of experience on teacher effectiveness; specifically, the "learning by doing" effect is most obvious in the early years of teaching.
- Teacher preparation: studies cited by King-Rice suggested that selectivity/prestige of the institution a teacher attended has a positive effect on student achievement, particularly at the secondary level; she also cited studies that suggest that teachers who have earned advanced degrees have a positive impact on high school mathematics and science achievement when the degrees were earned in these subjects. Evidence regarding the impact of advanced degrees on achievement was mixed when elementary students were the focus.
- Teacher certification: several studies were cited that allowed the author to conclude a positive effect of teachers certified in mathematics on high school mathematics achievement. Other studies in her analysis showed little clear impact of certified teachers on student performance in either mathematics or science, as compared to teachers who acquired emergency or alternative-route certification.
- Teacher coursework: teacher coursework in both subject area taught and pedagogy relates positively to academic achievement. Pedagogical coursework seems to contribute to teacher effectiveness at all grade levels, particularly when coupled with content knowledge. The importance of content coursework is most pronounced at the high school level. While studies-in-the-field experience is not designed to reveal causal relationships, positive effects are suggested as the experience results in reduced anxiety among new teachers.

- Teachers' own test scores: higher scores on tests that assess the teacher's literacy level or verbal abilities are associated with higher levels of student achievement; however scores on the National Teacher Examination and other state-mandated tests of basic skills and/or teaching abilities are less consistent predictors of teacher performance. (King-Rice, 2003).

—T.A. Harrell, 2004—

Teachers' own definitions of quality teachers are included in a study by T. A. Harrell (2004). In her Interactive Quality Analysis, Harrell found that "mental models of quality teachers reflected a high concentration of effort on organizational skills thus controlling for procedural effects and unexpected events, emphasis was placed on the actual instruction affinities leading to quality teachers to positive rewards and emotions" (p. 135). Her research also indicated that quality teachers may not agree with all administrative procedures, but they accept them as "part of the job." Teachers also defined quality teachers as teachers who possess "humanness," who do not work in isolation, and most importantly, who perceive value in their work"
(p. 136).

The Student Perspective

Teacher quality has been defined by various entities and individuals, as is apparent throughout the previous review of literature. The federal government has specified what it means to be "highly qualified" (NCLB, 2001), and scholars have also defined what they believe constitutes quality teaching. Teachers have offered a definition of quality teachers. As stated previously, this research study intends to cover the student perspective of what makes a quality teacher. The studies that follow are research studies that focus on the student perspective; though the research does not specifically answer the question, "What are the characteristics of a quality teacher?" the studies demonstrate the importance of investigating the perspectives of students, who bring experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and cultural knowledge that can shape the organization of schools and the training and preparation of teachers.

—Foley, 1994—

Foley's (1994) ethnographic work, *Learning Capitalist Culture*, highlights secondary students' perspectives on teachers. His extensive study examines the way in which the youth of a small town in South Texas learn traditional American values through participation in sports, formal and informal social groups, and interacting with teachers in classrooms. Foley describes in detail the classroom rituals and students' behaviors based on how teachers perceived and grouped students. Foley's work is based on the student perspective and demonstrates the correlation between student success and teacher expectations and attitudes.

—Turley, 1994—

This study *The Way Teachers Teach is, Like, Totally Whacked: The Student Voice on Classroom Practice* (1994) by Turley focuses on the characteristics of effective methods of teaching from the point of view of eight high school seniors who were individually interviewed. Five themes emerged from the data as related to classroom practices: (1) teaching methods can be effective for various reasons; (2) factors teachers should consider when framing the lessons; (3) the teacher's presence; (4) the teacher's personality as a factor in learning; and (5) students' preference for whole class and individual methods as opposed to forms of group works. Turley comments about the study, "Hearing their voices offers a challenge to researchers and teachers to work to remedy what we're frequently reminded does not work well for student learning and to encourage what we're informed does work. These students inform us that effective teaching is the coming together of method, context, student effort, and teacher commitment" (Turley, 1994, pp. 19–21).

—Lee, 1999—

Students' perspectives were a focus in Lee's ethnographic study (1999) that investigated the cause of failure for an urban high school undergoing transition into a science academy. Lee's study is significant in that the students' perspective on teachers was included as the students were trained and acted as researchers, thus including their voice in the research (Lee, 1999).

—Pomeroy, 1999—

Eva Pomeroy presents in her study, *The Teacher-Student Relationship in Secondary School: Insights from Excluded Students,* the accounts and results of 33 young students who were expelled from grades 10 and 11. It considers excluded students' perceptions of teacher qualities that either foster or hinder the development of positive relations and disciplinary practices. In this study, students' relationships with teachers surfaced as one of the most salient features of their educational experience. Pomeroy comments, "This study was born out of a belief in the inherent value of the views of young people and a recognition that these views are often absent from consideration. The depth of understanding gleaned from these views provides a basis upon which to construct a picture of teacher-student interactions in school not commonly represented" (1999, pp. 479–480).

—Valenzuela, 1999—

Secondary students' perspectives were also included in Valenzuela's (1999) work, *Subtractive Schooling*, where the students described the conditions of their education at Seguin High School. Students also described the treatment they received from teachers and administrators, the actions they took, and how the school officials responded to their educational needs. Valenzuela's work highlighted the students' voice and the concept of caring in schools.

—Howard, 2002—

In his article, *Hearing Footsteps in the Dark: African American Students' Descriptions of Effective Teachers,* Tyrone C. Howard (2002) highlights the findings from a 2-year study of elementary and secondary African American students in urban schools and their perceptions and interpretations of what characteristics constitute effective teaching. The students identified three central themes of what teachers and teaching styles promoted their academic achievement: (a) the presence of family, community, and home characteristics, (b) culturally-connected caring: and (c) verbal communication and affirmation. Howard states that "if students' perspectives of their learning environment offer critical insights for educators, not only can research and practice improve, but the academic and social empowerment of students may be greatly enhanced as well" (2002, p. 442).

Review—

History of and Current Perspectives on Teacher Evaluation

Formal evaluation of teaching appears to have had its origin in part during the nineteenth-century school practice movement as well as the in the efficiency movement of the early twentieth century (Biddle & Ellena, Eds., 1964). Early in the 1900s, scientific management swept the country with "efficiency," its catchword. Frederick Taylor's pioneering work—for the Bethlehem Steel Company and other industries in the 1890's—

with his emphasis on standardization, and simulation, laid the foundation for the "efficient age" (Kaufman, 1913, in Biddle & Ellena, p. 44).

—Reavis and Copper, 1945—

An early teacher evaluation/rating by Reavis and Copper (1945) included the following items: social relations (10 points); instructional skills (19 points); personal characteristics (15 points); non-instructional school service (14 points); professional qualifications (11 points); habits of work (10 points); and pupil results (10 points) (Davis, p. 53, in Biddle & Ellena, 1964).

—Harris, 1987—

On diagnostic evaluation of teachers, in the late 1980s, Harris (1987) noted that "supervisors can help teachers identify their strengths and weaknesses by systematically comparing data from three sources: classroom observation, teacher self-analysis, and student descriptions of teaching practices" (p. 46). He further purported that diagnostic evaluation of teachers can promote good teaching because of the following five features:

- Teaching behaviors are described in detail.
- Descriptive data are analyzed by predetermined criteria of desired behaviors.
- Teacher strengths and weaknesses are clearly identified via data manipulation with minimum opinion.
- Diagnoses lead to action alternatives.
- Diagnosed needs for improvement are so explicit that individual teachers can initiate change (Harris, 1987, p. 46).

An interesting feature of Harris's work is that he attributed different roles to the multiple sources of data in evaluating teachers. The sources of valid data, according to Harris, include the teacher as instrospector, the observer as systematic describer, and students as thoughtful interactors (Harris, 1987).

—National Association of Elementary and Secondary Principals, 1988—

In 1988, the National Association of Elementary and Secondary Principals (NAESP) published *Effective Teachers: Effective Evaluation in America's Elementary and Middle Schools*, which served as a guide for teacher evaluation at that time. The guide included:

- Establishing an affirmative atmosphere,
- Scheduling observations and conferences,
- Conducting the pre-evaluation conference,
- Observation and diagnosis,
- Recording observations, and
- Analyzing the data (NAESP, 1988).

An extra dimension of the evaluation guide provided additional information on feedback conferences, creating the setting, a conference agenda, the teacher's feedback, and a teacher plan of action (NAESP, 1988).

—Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1988—

The Personnel Evaluation Standards of the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1988) identified the following ten distinct purposes for high quality teacher evaluation:

1. Evaluate entry-level educators before certifying or licensing them to teach;
2. Identify promising candidates;
3. Assess candidates' qualifications;
4. Guide hiring decisions;
5. Assess performance of educators for tenure and promotion decisions;
6. Determine recognition and awards for meritorious contributions;
7. Assist faculty and administrators in identifying strengths and needs for improvement;
8. Plan meaningful staff development activities;
9. Develop remediation goals and activities; and when necessary
10. Support fair, valid, and legal decisions for termination (Stronge, 2006, pp. 6–7).

—Danielson and McGreal, 2000—

Danielson and McGreal (2000), in conjunction with the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, published, *Teacher Evaluation: To Enhance Professional Practice*. It highlighted the fact that unclear or inappropriate evaluative criteria, limited administrative expertise, and one-way communication render current teacher evaluation "meaningless' (p. 6). The authors contend that the traditional approach to teacher evaluation is no longer adequate; this has been the result of a greater understanding of learning and of what constitutes good teaching. Another factor has been

the advocacy by professional organizations in many states for content standards to benefit student learning (p. 7).

—Stronge, 2006—

Stronge in *Evaluating Teachers* (2006) stated, "Teacher evaluation, first, is about documenting the quality of teacher performance; then its focus shifts to helping teachers improve their performance as well as holding them accountable for their work" (Stronge, 2006, p. 1). Given the emphasis on teacher quality as expressed in the No Child Left Behind Act, as well as legislation, public policy, and practice in every state, a sound teacher evaluation system needs to be implemented. Stronge argues that "the basic needs in a quality teacher evaluation system are for a fair and effective evaluation based on performance and designed to encourage improvement in both the teacher being evaluated and the school" (p. 20). Furthermore, Stronge provides what he believes are the key features of an effective teacher evaluation system:

- mutually beneficial goals,
- emphasis on systemic communication,
- a climate that fosters an environment of mutual trust between the evaluator and the teacher,
- a technically sound evaluation system, and
- the use of multiple sources of data (pp. 2-10).

—Peterson and Peterson, 2006—

Peterson and Peterson (2006) documented effective teacher evaluations and offered seven suggestions to make teacher evaluation more effective:

1. Use the best objective evidence available;
2. Put the teacher at the center of the process, and give choices;
3. Use multiple data sources;
4. Use data sources that vary by individual teacher;
5. Incorporate student achievement data, where possible;
6. Use teacher judgment; and
7. Greatly expand the use for teacher evaluation (p. 10).

In addition to the seven suggestions mentioned above, the authors recommend that principals can promote improved teacher evaluation when they: install and promote good evaluation of themselves, applying the same principles of teacher evaluation as well as involving teachers in the evaluation; and advocate for improved teacher evaluation at the district level (pp. 15- 33).

The Student Perspective

Current trends in determining what constitutes a quality teacher necessitate a robust teacher evaluation program—and as some argue, one that includes the students' perspectives. Follman (1992) observed that "no other individual or group has [the] breadth, depth, or length of experience with the teacher…[and]…teachers look to their students rather than to outside sources for indications of their performance" (Follman 1992, in Stronge, 2006). The students, "as direct recipients of the teaching-learning process, are the major clients of teachers, they are in the key position to provide information about teacher effectiveness" (Stronge, 2006). More importantly, "students are the only ones of the teacher's clients who have direct knowledge about classroom practices on a regular basis" (p. 137). Previous research also indicated that by systematically comparing data from three sources, principals can help teachers identify their strengths and weaknesses. These three sources of data are classroom observation, teacher self-analysis, and student descriptions of teaching practices (Harris, 1987).

A wealth of research and literature pertaining to quality teachers and evaluation systems currently exists. However there is a void in current information in that the student perspective of what makes quality teachers is rarely included. This study intends to fill the void and augment the research by incorporating the student voice into the discussion of what makes a quality teacher.

Summary of Chapter II

This chapter laid the theoretical framework for this research study by including current research and literature pertaining to the topics of quality teachers and evaluating systems. In addition, this chapter provided a history of the changing concept of quality teachers as well as the evolution of and current perspectives on teacher evaluation systems. The first section contained a history of teacher certification standards and a history of the concept of quality teachers, followed with federal mandates of Title II. The second section provided a chronological review of existing research and literature pertaining to quality teachers. The last section provided a history of and current perspectives on teacher evaluating systems. In Chapter III, the methodology and procedures of the study will be presented.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology and procedures that will be used to examine the perceptions of K–12 students in high performing, mostly urban schools on the characteristics of quality teachers. First, this chapter begins with a description of the data, the sampling method and population of the districts, data collection instruments and protocols. Second, the chapter describes the specific methodology to be used and the design of the study. Third, the chapter describes how the existing data will be analyzed to address the research questions and what measures will be taken to ensure the credibility of the study.

Data

The study will use data collected by the Stupski Foundation, a non-profit organization founded by Joyce and Larry Stupski in 1996. The goal of the foundation is "to help ensure all children in America, regardless of race or income, have access to a high quality education" (Stupski Foundation, 2006). The Stupski Foundation formed a partnership with 10 large, predominantly urban (9 of the 10 schools are considered urban) school districts across the nation with diverse populations of students. In the spring of 2006, the researcher of this study worked as a consultant for the Stupski Foundation with a team of assessors to conduct focus group interviews with K–12 students in their schools. The majority of the interviews took place in the schools' library, but other

interviews were held in principals' offices. The 448 students interviewed were randomly selected by the schools' principals; however the organizational team requested to have students from various grade levels and students who participated in varied programs, such as special education, gifted and talented, compensatory education, Title 1 and bilingual education.

The Stupski team of assessors conducted focus group interviews with these students; each interview included the following 5 questions:

1. What would you change in your school if you were the principal?
2. What are the characteristics of quality teachers?
3. What kinds of activities does your school provide to bring your parents to school?
4. How safe do you feel in school and what does the school do to make you feel that way?
5. How would you describe the level of difficulty of the academic work you do in your school?

For the purpose of this study, only the students' responses to question two ("What are the characteristics of quality teachers?") will be analyzed. Furthermore, only the responses of students enrolled in high performing schools will be used. In order to provide a contextual background for the districts where the data were collected, this study will also analyze student achievement and demographic information, including the ethnic breakdown of students, economic status, school characteristics, and district profiles.

Sampling Method and Population of Districts and School

Existing data were used for this study. This study utilized qualitative methods designed to provide an in-depth description of the characteristics of quality teachers as perceived by the students enrolled in high performing schools. The participants in this study were randomly selected by the school principals of the schools in the ten urban schools districts that are part of the Stupak's District Alliance Partners (Stupski, 2006), though the principals were asked to include students from various grade levels and students who participated in varied programs, such as special education, gifted and talented, compensatory education, Title 1 and bilingual education. The participants were divided into three groups, elementary students (K–5), middle school students (6–8), and high school students (9–12) and were interviewed by the team of assessors. Pseudonyms for the students, the schools and the districts will be created to maintain anonymity.

Districts in the study are districts that have met previous criteria set by the Stupski Foundation. Each district has more than 30,000 students and less than 120,000 students, has children of color that make up at least one third of the general student body population, and has at least 30 percent of students who meet the criteria for free and reduced lunch. Of the 10 districts included in the study, 9 are considered to be urban. The locations of the districts are: California, Connecticut, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, New Jersey, North Carolina, Ohio, and Tennessee.

Data Collection Instruments and Protocols

Data were collected through focus group interviews of students in predominantly urban schools districts selected by the Stuspki Foundation. Focus group interviews, "open possibilities of listening to the plural voices of [students] as constructors and agents of knowledge" (Fine, 1994, p.75, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.840), and "enable researchers to have access to the opinions, viewpoints, attitudes, and experiences of individuals" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 840). This form of data collection was appropriate for the population being studied. The focus group interview "decreases the control of the researcher over the interview process" and involves not only "interaction between the moderator and the interviewees, but also interaction among the participants" (p. 840).

The interviews were not audio taped, but the students' responses were captured in written form by an administrative assistant of the team of assessors. Each member of the team of assessors reviewed the written notes for accuracy of recording. The field notes containing the student responses will be analyzed to answer the students' perceptions on the characteristics of quality teachers in high performing schools.

Methodology and Design

This study employed grounded theory as the theoretical framework. Grounded theory is an interactional method of theory building. It involves making comparisons and asking questions of the data. It is sometimes called the constant comparative method of analysis. Grounded Theory is an inductive, theory discovery methodology that allows the

researcher to develop a theoretical account of the general features of a topic while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical observations or data (Glasser & Strauss, 1967).

Comparative analysis, a strategy of Grounded Theory was used, allowing for "the systematic choice and study of several comparison groups" (p. 9). This process enables the researcher to "generate properties of categories that increase the categories' generability and explanatory power" (p. 24). Additionally, "allowing substantive concepts and hypotheses to emerge first, on their own, enables the analyst to ascertain which, if any, existing formal theory may help him generate his substantive theories" (p. 34).

According to *The Development of Grounded Theory* by Glasser and Strauss (1967) comparison groups "provide control over the two scales of generability: first, conceptual level and second, population scope (p. 55). Third, comparison groups also provide simultaneous maximization or minimization of both the differences and the similarities that data bear on the categories being studied (p. 54).

Data Analysis

The study applied three steps in the grounded theory of analytic process, as identified by Strauss and Corbin (1990):

Step 1: *Open coding* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was used to name and categorize the data collected from the student focus group interviews. Code words were

assigned to ideas that emerge from the data analysis. The code words were then categorized into broader themes.

Step 2: *Axial coding* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was then used to make connections between the categorized code words. Once the major themes were identified from existing data, differences in perception were examined to form subcategories.

Step 3: *Selective coding* (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was then be used to integrate categories and sub-categories to form a theoretical framework that served as a common thread among the categories and sub-categories.

The researcher kept records of the data findings on a personal computer secured with a password, known only to the researcher. The researcher also kept a paper copy of the data in a secure filing cabinet in the researcher's home. As the data were examined, pseudonyms for the students, the schools and the districts were created to maintain anonymity. The data analysis and the reporting of the findings were done using the following software and technology: Microsoft Word, Excel, Power Point, Internet Explorer, Yahoo Mail, and the university's web mail. The criteria for determining which schools are categorized as high performing was the criteria set by the No Child Left Behind (2001) requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress. Only responses from students enrolled in high performing schools were analyzed, based on the assumption that the higher performing schools are more likely to have a higher

concentration of quality teachers. The student responses to the question "What are the characteristics of quality teachers?" were analyzed using grounded theory to collect qualitative data. The next section will describe the credibility of the study.

Credibility

Guba and Lincoln (1994) identify credibility as the criterion in qualitative research that parallels internal validity. In qualitative research, "the credibility test asks if there is a correspondence between the way the respondents actually perceived social constructs and the way the researcher portrays their viewpoints" (Mertens, 1998, p.180). To enhance the credibility of this study the strategy of *Triangulation* was used—checking information that was collected from different sources or methods for consistency of evidence across sources of data (Mertens, 1998). The data were triangulated by examining the field notes of the interviews, by checking with members of the team of assessors who conducted the interviews for accuracy of the notes, and by reviewing the existing documents within the data warehouse of the Stupski Foundation.

The second strategy for improving credibility was *Peer Debriefing.* According to Mertens (1998), the researcher "should engage in an extended discussion with a disinterested peer, of findings, conclusions, analysis, and hypotheses. The peer should pose searching questions to help the researcher confront his or her own values and to guide next steps in the study" (p. 182). The third strategy of improving the credibility of this study was *Saturation of the Data Findings* (Merriam, 2002). This study examined

existing data collected in ten urban school districts throughout the nation until no new information emerged.

Summary of Chapter III

The purpose of this chapter was to describe the methodology and procedures that will be used to analyze the perceptions of students regarding the characteristics of quality teachers in high performing schools. This chapter began with a description of the methodology to be used, including the design of the study, sampling methods, protocols, data collection, and analysis. The chapter concluded with a description of the strategies that will be used to enhance the credibility of the study. In Chapter IV, the major themes of the research study findings will be presented in the form of a collective case study report.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the characteristics of quality teachers as perceived by 448 students ranging from kindergarten through twelfth grades in high performing schools. By examining the characteristics of quality teachers from the students' perspective, the results of this study can inform and assist practitioners, educational leaders and policy makers in developing strategies to ensure every student is taught by a quality teacher.

This chapter presents the results of the study. The first section includes district profile information for each of the 10 districts included in the study. The second section describes the findings of the study with subsections for elementary, middle, and high school. Each subgroup section also provides a quantitative analysis. The last section presents a comparative analysis of the emergent themes between each subgroup.

Districts in the Study

The following information was compiled to provide district profiles for each of the districts included in the study. Information was obtained from the districts' websites, the Stupski Foundation's publications and internal databases, state records, and public national databases. Each district is identified by a numeral in order to maintain anonymity. Profile information for each district includes location, demographics, general district information, and number of student participants for the 2006 school year. While

not all of the districts in the study are considered to be high performing, each of the schools from which students were interviewed were considered high performing, meaning the school met or exceeded AYP.

Public School District 1

District 1 is located in the Northeastern part of the United States. In 2006, it covered approximately 90 square miles and served portions of 11 communities of a major urban city. District 1 ranked as the second largest in the state with 40 elementary schools, 8 middle schools and 5 high schools. It served over 40,000 children in grades pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. The district served students with backgrounds representing over 60 cultures making its schools rich with ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. In the 2006–2007 school year, just under half of the students were Caucasian, about 40 percent were Hispanic, and the remaining population was almost evenly divided between African American and Asian students. More than one-third of the students in District 1 were low-income and about one quarter are English Language Learners (ELLs).

In a 10-year period, student enrollment had grown by approximately 8,500, and the district had opened 13 new schools. In addition, the ELL population doubled in the last 14 years. In 2006, over 70 percent of all students met or exceeded the state standards in reading, and more than 80 percent of all students met the state's annual measure of student achievement. In addition, every subgroup in every elementary school in the district met the NCLB Adequate Yearly Progress, a 41 percent improvement in three

years. A total of 25 students participated in the study though focus group interviews. All three grade levels were represented: (Elementary = 9 students), (Middle School = 8 students), and (High School = 8 students).

Public School District 2

District 2 is located in the North Eastern part of the United States and in 2006, served 25,000 students. The district was the seventh largest district in its state. Of the student population, 68 percent were Caucasian, 25.4 percent were African American, 4.1 percent were Hispanic, 2.1 percent were Asian, and 0.3 percent were American Indian. When data were collected, there were 31 schools in the district: one K–5 magnet school, 18 elementary, 6 middle, and 6 high schools. District 2 served about 7,000 military dependent students. Additionally, District 2 served about 4,300 special education students and 4,103 students who speak English as a second language (ELL students).

District 2 was identified in the top 10 percent of schools in the nation in meeting parents' goals. It was the only school system in its state to score above national norms in all five academic categories. The school system also received the Governor's A+ award for Excellence in Education and was twice recognized by the State School Boards Association for having the state's best school board. District 2 was one of only 10 districts in the nation that is ISO 9001 certified—a standard of effectiveness and efficiency recognized by businesses and organizations around the world. A total of 40

students in district 2 participated in the focus group interviews: (Elementary = 12 students), (Middle School = 14 students), and (High School = 14 students).

Public School District 3

Public School District 3 is located in the Central Eastern part of the United States. When the study was conducted in 2006, public school district 3 served its 57,698 students in a total of 118 schools; 18 were high schools, 17 special schools, and 83 schools served students from K–8 or 6–12. In the school year 2005–2006, the student body was composed of 70.3 percent African American, 16.7 percent Caucasian, 10.4 percent Hispanic, 1.7 percent Multiracial, 0.6 percent Asian or Pacific Islander, 0.3 percent America Indian or Native Alaskan, and 100 percent economically disadvantaged. The district also had 4.6 percent of English Language Learners and 18.9 percent of students with disabilities. Of the teachers in public school district 3, 99.9 percent held at least a Bachelor's degree and 40.2 percent held a Master's Degree. Properly certified and licensed teachers taught 96.5 percent of core academic subject elementary and secondary school classes.

In 2005, the city where district 3 is located was described in a census study of large cities as the "poorest city in America;" over 91 percent of the district's students were eligible for free and reduced lunch. The same year, the state department of education placed District 3 on "academic watch" for the third year in a row. The district

met none of the 25 state academic indicators, nor did it meet the federal AYP requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. Academically, students in grades 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 10 consistently scored below state standards in reading and mathematics. Graduation and attendance rates were substantially below the state requirement of 90 percent. A total of 53 students participated in the study: (Elementary = 11 students), (Middle School = 22 students), and (High School = 20 students).

Public School District 4

Public school district 4 is located in the East Central part of the United States. In 2006, District 4 was the 84th largest school district in the United States. It served over 53,000 students in 87 schools, of which 53 were elementary, 15 middle schools, 13 high schools, 1 Year-Round Classical School, 1 Web Academy, and 4 Special Schools. The ethnic breakdown of the district population included 47.47 percent African American, 38.65 percent Caucasian, 6.34 percent Hispanic, 3.95 percent "Other," 1.83 percent American Indian, and 1.76 percent Asian students. In the school year 2005–2006, the county in which the district was located had a population of 310,436. Public School District 4 employed approximately 6,600 people, including 3,418 teachers. The district was home to a large Air Force Base, and most of the children of military parents attended defense department schools on base.

In the school year 2005–2006, the district had an annual operating budget of $369 million, with an annual per pupil expenditure of $6,647.77. Compared to other districts in their state, Public School District 4 fared well in schools that met AYP requirements. Of the schools in the district, 12 had economically disadvantaged and/or minority children achieving at the same level as students in the majority. However, 7 schools in the district were on the state watch list because of a lack of progress in reading by African American students. A total of 67 students participated in the study: (Elementary = 37), (Middle School = 12), and (High School = 18).

Public School District 5

Public school district 5 is located in the Southeastern part of the United States. In 2006, it was the largest district in its state and ranked among the top 75 nationally in student enrollment. District 5 was composed of 94 schools with an enrollment of approximately 49,760 students in grades pre-Kindergarten through grade 12. Total enrollment included students in Regular, Gifted, Talented Arts, English as a Second Language, Magnet, and Vocational settings. In addition, the district served Exceptional Student classes for challenged students up to age 22. The district also served over 5,000 Adult Education students annually. There were approximately 6,800 full-time employees in the district, of those, 3,300 were teachers. Of the teachers in District 5, 27 percent held advanced degrees, and more than 97 percent of the teachers were state certified or met the High Qualified standards set by the No Child Left Behind Act.

In July 2004, Public School 5 settled its 47-year desegregation lawsuit, the longest suit of its kind in the nation. The district had experienced a decline in student enrollment from 55,600 students in 1999–2000. With this decline, the district also experienced a decline in federal and state funding. In 2006, District 5 showed a flat to negative trend in student achievement over the prior three years. There was an average 30 percent achievement gap between Caucasian and African American students in state assessments. One in 12 students entering 9th grade did not graduate high school. In school year 2004–2005, 74.1 percent of schools in District 5 met AYP, as compared to the state's 87.5 percent. A total of 40 students participated in the study: (Elementary = 10), (Middle School = 18), and (High School = 12).

Public School District 6

Public school district 6 is located on the Western coast of the United States. In 2006 it served over 10,000 students in two pre-schools, 8 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, 1 high school, 1 continuation school, and 1 community day school. The district employed 1,200 staff members and had an operating budget of $119 million. The district was the only one in its county that had not experienced decline in student enrollment over the prior few years. Public School District 6 had an ethnically, linguistically, and economically diverse population; approximately 30 percent of the students were second language learners, and 50 percent of the students qualified for free and reduced lunch. The district provided the following programs and services: a core K–12 instructional

program, a pre-Kindergarten program, a dual immersion program for 2 percent of the students in the district, and migrant education services for approximately 8 percent of the districts' students.

In the school year 2004–2005, the district met 28 of 30 AYP criteria, thus meeting AYP criteria district-wide. The district also met AYP the three previous years for all its major ethnic groups and also for the graduation rate. In the school year 2004–2005, the percentage of students scoring at the highest levels of their state standards assessment had increased from the previous school year 5.9 percent in English Language Arts and 7.3 percent in Mathematics. From 2003 to 2005, the number of high school students in District 6 who met the state's exit criteria increased by 17 percent. A total of 36 students participated in the study: (Elementary = 12), (Middle School = 12), and (High School = 12).

Public School District 7

Public District 7 is situated in a state capital in the Southern part of the United States. In 2006, Public School 7 served 32,403 students in 59 schools, including 8 high schools, 10 middle schools, 38 elementary schools, 2 special schools, and a Career Development Center. Pre-Kindergarten was offered in 23 of the elementary schools. The ethnic breakdown of the district population included 98 percent African American and 2 percent Caucasian students. Of the district population, 66.3 percent of students

were economically disadvantaged, 3.9 percent were disabled, and no English Language Learners were reported.

The district employed approximately 2047 teachers and 142 administrators. The student teacher ratio was 20:2:1 in elementary schools; 18:5:1 in middle school; and 18:4:1 in high school. The mobility rate for students was 22.1. A number of special programs were available to meet students' individual needs. Public School District 7 was the only district in the state to offer the International Baccalaureate program from elementary through high school. Every school in Public School District 7 was accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and also by their state Department of Education. Public School District 7 had an operating budget of approximately $185 million. A total of 40 students participated in the study through focus group interviews: (Elementary = 12), (Middle School = 14), and (High School = 14).

Public School District 8

Public School District 8 is located in the Northeastern part of the United States, in a city of 123,626 residents. In 2006, the district served approximately 20,759 students in grades K–12. The district served the students in 49 schools, including 29 elementary schools, 9 middle schools, 4 transitional schools, and 7 high schools. The population of District 8 consisted of 54.82 percent African American, 30.95 percent Hispanic, 11.08 percent Caucasian, 1.24 percent Asian American, and 0.05 percent Indian American

students. Approximately 57.9 percent of the students were considered economically disadvantaged.

The district employed over 1,600 teachers. Nearly 50 percent of those teachers had an average of 15 years of teaching experience, 80 percent held master's degrees or higher, and 20 percent were trained as mentors, assessors, or cooperating teachers. A total of 42 students participated in the study: (Elementary = 11), (Middle School = 16), and (High School = 15).

Public School District 9

Public School District 9 is located on the Southwest coast of the United States. In 2006, it served over 21,000 students in grades K–12 in 28 schools. The district population was composed of 55 percent Hispanic, 25 percent African American, and 16 percent Caucasian students. Of the students enrolled in District 9, 68 percent were considered to be economically disadvantaged. Approximately 26 percent of the students were classified as English Language Learners. Almost 30 other languages were represented including Armenian, Korean, and Tagalong; however of the ELL students, greater than 90 percent spoke Spanish as their primary language.

Enrollment in District 9 showed a steady decline from 29,123 students in 1970 to 22, 669 in 2003 to 21,000 in 2006. This decline in enrollment was due primarily to the non-minority student flight to private schools. Public School District 9 had a significantly high number of private schools, as compared with other districts in its state;

approximately a third of the district's school-age population and over half of the non-minority population were enrolled in non-public schools. This caused the racial/ethnic composition of the district to change drastically over the past three decades. A total of 42 students participated in the study: (Elementary = 11), (Middle School = 10), and (High School = 21).

Public School District 10

Public school district 10 is located on the East coast of the United States in a community with a diverse population of approximately 150,000. In 2006, district 10 was the third largest school district in its state. Of the approximately 28,000 students enrolled in the district, 53.8 percent were Hispanic, 37.6 percent African American, 6 percent Caucasian, and 2.5 percent Asian Pacific Islander. Between 2002 and 2006, the student population had increased by 7 percent; the number of African American students had increased by 4 percent and the number of Hispanics by 12 percent. Of the students in District 10, 12.4 percent were bilingual, 13.8 percent were special education; and 2.5 percent were considered gifted and talented. These students were served by over 4,200 staff members, 2,900 of whom were teachers. The average per pupil expenditure was over $12,000.

Approximately 63 percent of the students enrolled in District 10 were considered economically disadvantaged. The area where District 10 is located had an unemployment rate of 13 percent. The school system was the major employer in the area. When the

study was conducted in 2006, District 10 had been under State take over for 12 years. This means the district received direction from the State for academic guidelines. According to the Assistant Commissioner of Education of the State, new legislation describing the expectations for school district performance was required for public school district 10 to regain its own autonomy. A total of 63 students in District 10 participated in the study: (Elementary = 21), (Middle School = 21), and (High School = 21).

District Demographics

As shown on Table 1, the total student enrollment in the districts ranged from ten thousand students in the smallest district to over fifty seven thousand students in the largest district. The student population was somewhat evenly distributed in some districts while others had one particular group of students which made up the majority, such as districts three, four, five and seven. Table 1 provides demographic information for each of the participating districts.

Table 1: Demographics of Participating Districts

District	Student Enrollment	White	African American	Hispanic	Other	SES	ELL	Special Ed.
One	40000	40.0%		40.0%		33.0%		
Two	25000	65.0%	25.4%	4.1%	2.4%		16.4%	17.2%
Three	57698	16.7%	70.3%	10.4%	0.9%	100.0%	4.6%	18.9%
Four	53000	47.5%	1.8%	38.7%	4.0%			
Five	49760	19.3%	76.8%		3.9%	84.7%		13.7%
Six	10000							
Seven	32403	2.0%	98.0%		0.0%	66.3%	0.0%	3.9%
Eight	20759	11.1%	54.8%	30.0%	30.0%	57.9%		
Nine	21000	16.0%	25.0%	55.0%		68.0%	23.0%	
Ten	28000	6.0%	37.6%	53.0%		63.0%	12.4%	13.8%

Note: Enrollment indicates the total number of students who were reported in membership by the district and the state in 2006. Numerous unsuccessful attempts were made to collect the missing information from several districts.

Table 2 lists the number of participants per grade level for each participating district. The number of students participating in elementary and middle schools was approximately the same, while the number of high school participants was slightly

higher. The total number of participants was 448 students from kindergarten through twelfth grade. Of the total 448 students interviewed, 32.6% were in elementary, 32.1% middle school, and 34.6% high school.

Table 2: Student Participants per Grade Levels in Each District.

Districts	Elementary K–5	Middle School 6–8	High School 9–12	District Total
One	9	8	8	25
Two	12	14	14	40
Three	11	22	20	53
Four	37	12	18	67
Five	10	18	12	40
Six	12	12	12	36
Seven	12	14	14	40
Eight	11	16	15	42
Nine	11	10	21	42
Ten	21	21	21	63
Totals	**146**	**147**	**155**	**448**
Percentage	**33%**	**32%**	**35%**	**100 %**

Findings

The findings are presented in the order of the research questions. Prefacing the report of findings is an explanation of the methodology the researcher employed in order to interpret the data. For the purpose of this study, a characteristic is defined as a distinguishing feature and/or a distinctive trait or attribute of quality teachers. The first section provides the perceived characteristics of quality teachers according to elementary students. The focus group interviews with elementary students from the 10 districts yielded three characteristics: (1) quality teachers are fun, (2) quality teachers are caring, and (3) quality teachers are flexible. The second section details the perceived characteristics of quality teachers according to middle school students. Four themes arose from the focus group interviews with middle school students: (1) quality teachers are fun, (2) quality teachers are caring, (3) quality teachers are flexible, and (4) quality teachers are relevant (in the material they teach). The third section addresses the perceived characteristics of quality teachers according to high school students. Five characteristics of quality teachers emerged from the focus group interviews with high school students: (1) quality teachers are fun, (2) quality teachers are knowledgeable, (3) quality teachers are flexible, (4) quality teachers are respectful, and (5) quality teachers are caring.

Further, to address each research question, the themes that emerged from the qualitative data are followed by a quantitative analysis. The chapter concludes with a

comparative analysis of the emerging themes across all grade levels. All participants' responses are presented in a manner that maintains anonymity.

Methodology

The researcher used grounded theory to extract the major themes, or characteristics, from the written record of the students' responses during the focus group interviews. The three steps in the grounded theory of analytic process were employed: 1) open coding, 2) axial coding, and 3) selective coding. To perform open coding, the researcher highlighted key words and phrases contained in the student responses from each subgroup (elementary, middle school, and high school) and these were used as code words. The code words were then reviewed to identify any major themes. This was done by counting the number of times the code words were cited by the students in each subgroup. If the code words appeared more than ten times in the collected responses from each subgroup, then it was considered a major theme.

Applying the steps of axial and selective coding, the researcher was able to review the code words again to make connections between the broader themes and any other code words which supported or explained the major themes; these were considered subcategories. For example, *fun* was a code word the students used very often. After it emerged as a major theme, the researcher was able to connect to the characteristic *fun* the following other code words and phrases: *funny, games, jokes, laughter, having fun in class, playing games, and making learning fun*. Such connections were made based on

word association, and in some cases the researcher referred to existing literature pertaining to related themes in order to validate potential connections. The researcher continued these steps until no further associations could be made between the major themes, subcategories, and code words.

Characteristics of Quality Teachers as Perceived by Elementary Students

Three characteristics of quality teachers emerged from the focus group interviews with elementary students. These include: (1) quality teaches are *fun,* (2) quality teachers are *caring,* and (3) quality teachers are *flexible*.

1. Quality Teachers are Fun.

The written record of the students' responses to the question "What are the characteristics of quality teachers?" contains 44 total references to the word *fun*, or to words which were associated with *fun* using the three coding steps. The following words/phrases were connected to the major theme: funny, games, having fun in class, makes learning fun, let's us play games, has games for all the teaching, makes up songs, and tells jokes. Each of these phrases was taken directly from the elementary students' responses. The following direct quotes from the elementary students who participated in the focus group interviews illustrate the students' perception of *fun* as a characteristic of quality teachers:

Kids like to have fun, especially when they are in school because it makes learning easier. Quality teachers have a sense of humor, they encourage their students to do their best, and they also make learning fun. Quality teachers are fun.

Quality teachers can balance learning and fun; they know how to organize all their stuff so they can plan fun things for the students to learn. They make you forget you're in the classroom because you are having so much fun.

My teacher is a quality teacher because she makes learning a lot of fun; she always has folders with fun activities about the lessons. She makes up games that help you remember the stuff she teaches. It doesn't even feel like you're learning. Sometimes I forget I'm in class because I'm having so much fun learning, it feels like I'm at home just relaxing and having fun.

Quality teachers know how make up games around all the lessons. For example, in math, my teacher let's us play the 'memory game.' In science, she makes up songs to help us remember stuff.

Quality teachers make learning fun because they know kids like to have fun and play games, so they make up games to help kids remember what they are learning; they know we have to be in school for a long time, so they make learning fun, you know, they are just fun teachers.

The focus group interviews elicited the elementary students' perception that quality teachers are fun. Students characterized fun teachers as those who make learning enjoyable and organize classrooms with instructional games and organize activities around learning objectives. Further, the students referred to quality teachers as those who

have a good sense of humor as they delivered instruction. They created a picture of a teacher who uses positive classroom management skills, is proactive in the daily planning of each and every lesson, and finds creative ways to engage the students during instruction. And the students said again and again, quality teachers deliver instruction in such a way that the students perceive that they are having fun. They create entertaining songs and games to aid in memory retention and to keep students engaged.

2. Quality Teachers are Caring.

A second characteristic that emerged from the focus group interviews with elementary students was quality teachers are caring. The word *caring*, or words the researcher related to *caring* appeared 40 times within the students' responses to the question: "What are the characteristics of quality teachers?" The words/phrases considered to be related to *caring* include: good listener, helps us learn the lessons, loves us all, helps all students learn, nice, smiles a lot, is kind, patient, understands us, one that is gentle, and shows us she is happy to be with us. The following direct quotes from elementary students who participated in the focus group interviews typify the students' perception of the characteristic *caring*:

> My teacher really cares about me, she knows when I'm behind on my work and she takes the time to help. Sometimes she stays after school or comes early in the morning. I know she has kids of her own, but she still takes the time to help me. I also know she cares about all students because she doesn't embarrass us in class, and she knows us outside the classroom. My teacher absolutely loves teaching, especially reading. She reads all the time and gets so excited when she reads to us. I guess you could say she has transferred her passion for reading to us.

Our teacher really cares about us because she knows you as a person and she also works with you if something's going on at home. Like when my grandfather died, she gave me extra time to turn in my work. A caring teacher is happy to be teaching and she enjoys being with kids.

We know our teacher is a quality teacher because she really cares for us. She knows how to teach to all, she's patient, and teaches with respect to all kids. She is fair with all kids—it doesn't matter if you're rich and popular or if you're a nobody in school, she treats you the same.

My teacher shows he cares because he knows what we can do, he encourages doing our best, and when we have trouble, he explains things in different ways to make sure all the students understand the material. That makes you want to work harder, when teachers care.

My teacher taught a Spanish student how to speak English. She was very helpful and kind.

My teacher cares about us because she explains what is wrong with our work, lets us correct it, and gives us feedback. She keeps good track of all students' work.

A quality teacher is one that really cares for her students, she knows what to say and do when kids are having problems, not just in class, but outside the school. When you know that teachers care, you want to do your best because you don't want to disappoint yourself and your teacher. Caring teachers don't embarrass you in class, they just tell you what you're doing wrong, how to fix it, and go on about teaching in a kind way.

A caring teacher is fair. The whole class is not punished for one student's mistakes.

According to the elementary students' perception, quality teachers are caring individuals who exhibit: patience, gentleness, warmth, understanding of individual needs, and the desire to help all students learn and succeed. Elementary students also indicated that caring teachers are good listeners, encouraging, tender, and above all, effective in demonstrating a consistent love for all children. When students described caring teachers as teachers who love students, they emphasized caring teachers know students individually, not only their academic skills, but also know the students' family, cultural and ethnic background, as well as the community in which the students interact on a daily basis.

Elementary students also described caring teachers as teachers who know and understand each students' skill level and ability, teachers who are patient with all students, and teachers who encourage students to excel in school. Students conveyed that caring teachers are trustworthy, affectionate, helpful, fair, respectful, kind, dedicated, understanding, and demonstrate excitement about teaching and being in the classroom. According to students, teachers are effective when they deeply care about each student as a human being first, and secondly as a student, capable of developing into a full-grown individual.

3. Quality Teachers are Flexible.

A third characteristic which emerged from the focus group interviews with elementary school students is that quality teachers are *flexible*. This characteristic and the

associated words/phrases were cited 32 times in the students' recorded responses. Words and phrases which were linked to *flexible* include: always has activities for us, let's us work in groups, plans activities for each lesson, knows how to teach to all students, know how we learn best, they don't get all mad when we have interruptions, they tutor the kids that need extra help, always have materials ready, and even extra materials, and they make every lesson interesting. The following direct quotes recorded during the focus group interviews with elementary students demonstrate the students' perception of *flexible* as a characteristic of quality teachers:

> When we have a lot of stuff going on in school, like intramurals, picture day, and awards day for AR readers (Accelerated Reader), good teachers are flexible. They change the teaching a little bit to make sure we learn what we are supposed to learn for the day, and they don't act mad with the kids because the day was busy or different. When we are waiting in line for anything, we usually go over our multiplication tables or sing a song to remember some stuff we learned.

> My teacher is a quality teacher because she varies our work. She let's us read, write, play games, and she always plans activities after each lesson. Quality teachers know how students learn, and they plan different activities so all students can understand the material. Quality teachers take the time to plan activities and prepare all the materials so we won't waste time when we are learning. They know how to make every lesson interesting.

> Quality teachers are flexible. They plan many activities, instead of having us just read and write. They are very organized, and we move from one activity to the next without wasting time disciplining kids because everybody is very interested in all the exciting things that are going on in class. Those teachers know how to keep kids engaged all the time, they make you want to come to school because you know that something exciting is going to happen every time you come to school.

> Our teacher is awesome, he definitely is a quality teacher. You can't wait to go to his classroom. All day you wait for his class because you know something exciting is going to happen. He always has two or even three activities planned for the lessons, he has all the materials ready, and once we're in there, you don't waste time; you move from one activity to the next, and before you know it, it's time to go. One thing I really like about him is that he always has extra materials for the kids that are absent or sick, so when they came back they can catch up to the rest of the class right away.

> Takes the time to review a subject until all or a majority of the students get it. She allows students to work in groups.

> Quality teachers let students pick the subjects they want to report on. They are flexible and allow kids to choose instead of just ordering them what to do.

The students' responses suggested that the students had two different meanings of flexible: 1) flexible teachers can adjust their schedules to interruptions of daily school activities, and 2) flexible teachers incorporate various teaching strategies and activities to daily lessons. The latter one was used most often when describing flexible teachers. The researcher chose to keep both traits linked in support of the one major characteristic.

Elementary students described flexible teachers as those who plan, understand their students' learning skills, and prepare and apply a wide range of teaching strategies. They described teachers who demonstrate a deep understanding of students' needs and organize instruction accordingly. Students conveyed that flexible teachers positively

impact learning through the use of a wide variety of age-appropriate, learning activities to enhance students' abilities.

Elementary students further characterized flexible teachers as those who understand that daily interruptions such as assemblies, picture day, contests, etc. are part of the instructional day and are able to adjust their teaching to accommodate changes in routine. Quality teachers know that students learn in different modalities and at different rates. Flexible teachers pre-assess, re-teach, post-assess, and keep students informed of their progress. They integrate questioning techniques, plan cooperative learning activities, and provide individual assistance or tutoring to students who require extra assistance in mastering skills and concepts. According to elementary students, flexible teachers have materials prepared in advanced, including extra materials, and are able to maintain momentum by transitioning smoothly from one activity to the next and utilize every opportunity to teach important skills.

Quantitative Analysis of Elementary School Students' Perceptions

Once the focus group interview data were analyzed, the researcher performed a quantitative analysis to determine which characteristics were most prevalent. This analysis revealed that *fun* was most often referenced by the elementary school participants. The second most prevalent characteristic was *caring*. Still significant, but less often referred to, was the third characteristic. Table 3 shows a representation of the distribution of the emergent characteristics perceived by elementary students.

Table 3: Elementary School Perceived Characteristics of Quality Teachers

Characteristic	***Times cited***	***Percentage***	***Rank***
Fun	44	37.9 %	1
Caring	40	34.5 %	2
Flexible	32	27.6 %	3

Note: within the 71 responses to the research question, there were 116 references to the major themes. Calculations for Table 3 were based on these 116 references..

Characteristics of Quality Teachers as Perceived by Middle School Students

Four characteristics of quality teachers emerged from the data collected during the focus group interviews with middle school students. These included: (1) quality teachers are *fun*; (2) quality teachers are *caring;* (3) quality teachers are *flexible;* and (4) quality teachers are *relevant (with the material they teach).*

1. Quality Teachers are Fun.

The recorded responses the middle school participants provided to the question, "What are the characteristics of quality teachers?" contain 52 references to the word *fun* or to words which were associated with fun using the three coding steps. The following words/phrases contained in the middle school students' comments were considered to be connected to the major theme: makes learning fun by interacting with students, highly motivated and plans fun activities, funny, allows students to play educational games, shares jokes, laughs when things are funny, has a good sense of humor, plan fun things for students to learn, the ones that can get the work done and still put in time for fun, makes the class lots of fun, the ones that always try something new that made learning fun, and funny and keeps students entertained. The following responses middle school students gave during the focus group interviews exemplify the students' perception of *fun* as a characteristic of quality teachers:

Quality teachers can be described as teachers who make learning fun. They use creative ways of teaching, and they are not embarrassed to show students that there are fun and sometimes silly ways of learning things. For example, our science teacher had us make up raps to memorize the table of elements. We were allowed to practice in class and some kids even danced to their raps. I don't think I'll ever forget that unit.

Quality teachers are quick to think of many ways kids learn. They know how to make learning fun. They plan games around every single lesson and that makes you want to go to their class, because you never know what to expect when you walk into their rooms. You look forward to that period because you know you're going to learn and have fun at the same time.

Quality teachers know how to make students feel comfortable in class so they can feel good about themselves and learn better. They don't judge kids. They are fun teachers and it shows because they have fun around kids, they can laugh at funny things, and they look like they have fun teaching middle school kids. Quality teachers are fun and know how to interact with kids our age and you can tell they feel comfortable around us, you know… they like to have fun with us while we learn. You can tell they like to be around middle school kids.

Quality teachers know how to teach in very creative ways that are fun for students. Those teachers make you want to come to school, because they make learning fun. They can make learning fun by planning many activities, games and assign projects that require thinking and work; they don't just give you busy work. Fun teachers are quality teachers because they know how to teach well and they are just fun to be around.

Quality teachers are fun to be around. They have a good sense of humor. It's evident they like middle school kids. They are at ease with us, and they teach to all kids, not just the popular ones. They plan and organize games around lessons.

> Quality teachers make learning fun. They use creative ways of teaching, not just read and answer the questions. They actually create games for the lessons.

Middle school students depicted *fun* teachers as those who use games as learning tools, plan numerous activities to actively engage students in learning and allow time for the students to explore different ways of learning instructional material in a fun and relaxed classroom atmosphere. They suggested that fun teachers are resourceful and use fun activities not only to make learning more pleasurable, but to make it more productive and meaningful to students. Middle school students referred to fun teachers as teachers who are effective in creating an environment in which students are able to interact socially not only with each other, but with their teachers as well. Fun teachers, according to the students, are at ease with their students and are comfortable sharing jokes and laughing at comic events, yet are able to keep instruction focused on learning. Students recounted that fun teachers are passionate about what they teach because they take the time to plan fun, instructional games and activities that are applicable to the material they are teaching. On the other hand, middle school students suggested that teachers who are stoic, inflexible, and lecture without variation of teaching strategies, were teachers of poor quality.

2. Quality Teachers are Caring.

Another characteristic which emerged from the focus group interviews with middle school students was *caring*. The written record of the of the students' responses contains 33 references to the characteristic *caring*, or to words or phrases which were identified with the major theme. The following words/phrases used by the middle school students were considered to be related to broader theme *caring*: understanding, takes the students' point of view seriously, willing to provide students additional help, willing to listen, willing to provide individual attention, very helpful, really cares for the students and want to be their friend, talks nicely to students, encouraging, go the extra mile to get to know students, fair with all students, enjoys being around junior high kids. The following direct quotes represent the student perception of *caring* as a characteristic of a quality teacher:

> Quality teachers go the extra mile to get to know you; they show they care about you as a person. They know when things are wrong at home or whatever, and so they take the time to listen to you. Quality teachers offer tutoring after school; they don't let you get behind in your work, and they understand if you have hectic extracurricular activities. They simply show you they care about you."

> A quality teacher is one that shows you she really cares about you and your learning. You can tell she cares because she won't let you slide. She will keep after you until you do your work and do it right.

My math teacher is a quality teacher, he really cares about us. He always knows exactly what we need. If we're feeling down because something is going on at home, if we're in trouble with another teacher, or if you're behind on your work, he'll work with you until you get all caught up, or he'll just listen.

Quality teachers are understanding. They help you when you're behind on your work, and they let you do extra things to bring up your grades.

Quality teachers show they care by acting human, not like dictators. They understand middle school kids.

Quality teachers are caring and fair. They can be strict but also very supportive. They take the time to work with individual kids who need extra help.

Caring teachers were considered by the middle school students to be teachers who show patience, respect, fairness, dedication, and passion. Middle school students described caring teachers as those who demonstrate patience, understand individual needs— academic, social, and emotional, and treat their students first as individuals and then as students. At the same time, these teachers display tremendous interest in the students' learning. The students' responses suggested that caring teachers take responsibility for the education of every student, regardless of gender, race, socio-economic status, or academic ability. These teachers are non-judgmental and exhibit a genuine desire to help all students.

On the contrary, teachers who are unaffectionate, inflexible, rigid, and do not allow students or interruptions to deviate from his/her scheduled daily lessons, were perceived as non-quality teachers by the middle school students.

3. Quality Teachers are Flexible.

Contained within the middle school students' recorded replies to the question, "What are the characteristics of quality teachers?" are 25 references to the third theme which arose from the data—*flexible*. The following list includes the key words and phrases used by the students which were identified as related to the overall theme: use various teaching strategies, let's us work in groups, plans activities for each lesson, lets us do research, lets us pick the research projects we want to work on, let's us make up games and songs to remember material, lets us use smart boards and power point, has good organizational skills, plans ahead, uses many teaching strategies, pace the work right for everyone, and offers tutoring. The following responses demonstrate the middle school perception of *flexible* as a characteristic of quality teachers:

> I can think of a quality teacher, my history teacher. He is awesome. You never know what to expect in his class. He always has two or three activities to teach his lessons, and you never get bored. You always look forward to his class because you know he teaches in different ways so everyone can understand and learn.

> Our algebra teacher is also a quality teacher, he has interesting ways of teaching. For example, first he teaches the lesson and ties it to everyday things that are

interesting to us, then he assigns group work and allows us to create ways to remember our work, like making up raps and acting out our assignments. That way we can remember our work because we have to present it to the class.

Quality teachers know how to vary their teaching by not only lecturing, but by teaching using technology like the 'smart boards,' letting us do research in the library, doing individual and group projects, and by using art.

Quality teachers are flexible with daily school interruptions and flexible with the teaching they do. They have plenty of activities for us to do.

They plan games and activities for the lessons so we won't be bored and act up.

Quality teachers know how to teach and explain things so all kids can learn—kids that are a little slower, kids that are just learning English, and all the regular kids too.

Quality teachers know how to pace the material just right and teach in a way or ways that every student understands before moving on.

According to middle school students, teachers who are flexible and use various teaching strategies were perceived as quality teachers. When students described flexible teachers, they talked about teachers who use teaching approaches designed to reach all students. Based on middle school students' responses, quality teachers understand the complexities of teaching, know how students learn, and plan numerous instructional

activities around each lesson, and employ various teaching strategies. The students described teachers who develop age and lesson-appropriate activities that enhance teaching and spark student interest. Middle school students also indicated that flexible teachers keep the students engaged in the learning process by keeping students informed of their progress. When students are behind in their work, flexible teachers work with students in a variety of ways so they can complete all their assignments, thus enabling the students to be academically successful. Further, flexible teachers are able to adjust when interruptions to class time occur.

4. Quality Teachers are Those Whose Teaching is Relevant.

The fourth characteristic which was identified through the focus group interviews with middle school students was *relevant*. This word and its associated words and phrases were used 11 times by the students in the interviews. The words and phrases found to be related to the major theme include: useful, applicable to real life, assigns important work, relate lessons to real life situations, makes work relevant, useful in real life issues, teach things we can use outside the class, and teach real life stuff. Direct quotes from the students' responses to the question, "What are the characteristics of quality teachers?" are included. The quotes that follow express the middle school perception of *relevant* as a characteristic of quality teachers:

Our math teacher is a quality teacher; she assigns work that is important. For example, when we were learning about perimeter and area, she had us work in groups to figure out how much carpet we would need to carpet the entire eighth grade hall. Stuff like that will be useful when we get out of school. When we do work that we can use in real life, we pay more attention, and we have less discipline problems.

Quality teachers know how to relate their lessons to real life situations. They teach in a way that is interesting and help students know that what they are teaching will be useful in life. They lecture very little and help us make the connection of what we are learning and why we are learning it. It's really those teachers who make learning relevant to us.

They can relate the material to each individual student's own personal experiences.

They teach us useful stuff that we can actually use in real life, like when we wrote a letter to complain about Nike shoes—that was fun, too.

Teachers that teach useful things, like how to figure out stuff on menus and what to say and do when you don't agree with other people, without fighting or cussing.

Mr. E. shares how the real world is.

Teachers who make learning relevant were perceived as quality teachers by the middle school students. The students described quality teachers as those who relate their teaching to real life situations and those who help students connect what they are learning

and apply it to their lives. Students expressed the importance of having teachers who are pertinent and can help them understand the relevance of what they are learning in order for students succeed in high school and beyond. According to middle school students, relevant teachers are perceived as quality teachers because they are able to make every lesson count, they enable the students to understand the relevance of what is being taught, and they provide meaningful connections of school work to real life situations.

Quantitative Analysis of Middle School Students' Perceptions

Major themes that emerged from the responses middle school students gave during the focus group interviews were reviewed using quantitative analysis to determine which characteristics were most prevalent. As apparent in table 4, *fun* was the most prevalent characteristic of quality teachers perceived by middle school students. Consistent with elementary themes, next prevalent was *caring*, and then *flexible*. *Relevant* was the least cited trait of quality teachers yet remained significant to the middle school student perspective.

Table 4: Middle School Perceived Characteristics of Quality Teachers.

Characteristic	***Times cited***	***Percentage***	***Rank***
Fun	52	43.0 %	1
Caring	33	27.3 %	2
Flexible	25	20.7 %	3
Relevant	11	9.1 %	4

Note: the 147 total middle school students interviewed provided 69 responses to the research question; contained within those responses were 121 total number of references to the major themes. Calculations for Table 4 were based on 121 and were rounded to the 10th decimal.

Characteristics of Quality Teachers as Perceived by High School Students

Five characteristics of quality teachers emerged from the focus group interviews with high school students. These included: (1) *quality teachers are fun*; (2) *quality teachers are knowledgeable;* (3) *quality teachers are flexible; (4) quality teachers are respectful; and (5) quality teachers are caring.*

1. Quality Teachers are Fun.

The written record of the high school students' responses to the question, "What are the characteristics of quality teachers?" contains 63 total references to the word *fun*, or to words which were associated with *fun* using the three coding steps. The following words/phrases were connected to the major theme: Makes learning fun for the students, have a good sense of humor, laugh at comical stuff, felt at ease with students, plans fun activities for each lesson, allows us to be creative, we can make up games that are applicable, makes learning fun and interesting, makes learning fun by relating things that are going on in our life to the lessons. The following responses illustrate the high school students' perception of *fun* as characteristic of quality teachers:

> Our government teacher is a quality teacher. He makes learning fun by allowing us to be creative, he provides ample time for us to discuss important issues and is able to understand our point of view. He works on developing a good relationship with all students. He can be a friend, tells jokes, but at the same time, he's firm and you don't forget he's the teacher.

> Quality teachers know how to have fun while they are teaching, they see themselves as facilitators. They understand they don't know it all, so they relax around students. When teachers are relaxed around students they also have fun teaching, which make us want to learn more.

> A quality teacher let's you see her as a person, you know, laughs when something is funny. It's cool when you see teachers that are passionate about what they do, but at the same time they can show you they are human. Students want to have fun, there's nothing wrong with that if we're still learning. Quality teachers know

how to balance fun and learning, and they know how to teach in ways that allow students to have fun.

Quality teachers make learning fun. They allow students to use technology like 'smart boards,' power point, and let us do research that is fun to us.

Quality teachers have fun with us like when we have extracurricular activities, they incorporate them into their teaching, that makes learning fun.

Fun teachers are quality teachers. High school is all about fun—you know, being cool. We spend so much time in school that it should be fun. Quality teachers know that so they plan fun things for us to do in class.

Quality teachers don't take themselves or us too seriously. They know how to have fun and they teach in a way that is entertaining. They keep us interested all the time.

High school students indicated that quality teachers have fun teaching and interacting with students and provide many opportunities for students to participate in various amusing activities and instructional games. They also suggested that quality teachers interact socially in a positive manner that allows the students to have fun while learning. Students described fun teachers as having a sense of humor and laughing with them. Fun teachers allow and encourage the students to work in creative ways (such as making up games and rhymes to remember material) and are able to create activities

which stimulate the students and keep them engaged. Students, further indicated that fun teachers are also skilled in planning instructional group activities, where teachers are facilitators and students are allowed to demonstrate their abilities, knowledge, and engagement in creative, fun ways.

2. Quality Teachers are Knowledgeable.

Contained in the responses the high school students provided during the focus group interviews were 46 references to the characteristic knowledgeable. This number accounts for direct uses of the word itself as well as other words/phrases which were connected to the major theme; these include: knows her/his stuff, solid knowledge, command of the subject, knows it by heart, connects everything to her/his subject, passionate about the subject, enthusiastic about what they teach, having a college degree, and assign work that stretches your knowledge and make you learn more. The following direct quotes taken from the high school students during the focus group interviews demonstrate the student's perception of *knowledgeable* as a characteristic of quality teachers:

> Quality teachers are those who are masters of the subjects they teach. These teachers understand kids learn differently, so they plan accordingly. Quality teachers really know what they are teaching, they know it by heart and challenge your thinking. Quality teachers know what they are teaching, they can relate just about everything to the subject they teach.

> You can tell when a teacher is knowledgeable about the subject he or she teaches; they are very enthusiastic about teaching, they inspire you to seek further

information about what they are teaching, you know they are preparing you for advanced work, so you want to excel. Their knowledge and passion for what they do is evident everyday.

They prepare you for college, to do well on the SAT, and they have a good reputation with other students that have had them before.

Quality teachers always challenge you to do better. They know what they are teaching because they keep students interested, even if the material is boring.

Quality teachers know their stuff. They don't just read from the teacher's book, they know it and they explain the subject so every kid can understand it.

Quality teachers know what they teach, the stuff they tell you makes sense, and you know they are knowledgeable about what they teach because they went to college.

According to high school students, quality teachers are *knowledgeable* about the subject they teach. The students perceived knowledgeable teachers as those who have solid command of the subject matter and possess the necessary skills to effectively convey their knowledge to students. These teachers demonstrate passion for their field of study, and their enthusiasm interests the students and inspires them to want to learn more. The students' responses also indicated that knowledgeable teachers exhibit professionalism, stay abreast of the latest research regarding the subject they teach,

continue their professional development, interact with other teachers, and reflect on their own practice. Students conveyed that knowledgeable teachers are not intimidated by students when their knowledge is questioned or challenged, because they understand that teaching and learning is a process and all participants engaged in the process can benefit. Furthermore, high school students described knowledgeable teachers as visionaries, teachers who understand the importance of providing the necessary skills and knowledge to students so they can be successful well beyond high school.

3. Quality Teachers are Flexible.

Another theme that emerged from the interviews with high school students is that quality teachers are *flexible.* The high school participants referred a total of 32 times to the characteristic *flexible* or to the words/phrases which were found to be associated with the major theme; these included: have lots of activities planned, don't just lecture, make you work and make learning interesting, use various teaching strategies, let us work in groups, are good planners, have plenty of activities for each lesson, let us do research, incorporate technology like using power point, good organizational skills, plans ahead, uses many teaching strategies, and pace the work right for everyone. The quotes which follow frame the high school students' perception of *flexible* as a characteristic of quality teachers:

Quality teachers are committed to teaching and to students learning. They organize their daily work in a way that students work in a productive way. Quality teachers use many teaching strategies; they lecture and discuss, they assign individual and group projects, use the Internet, invite guess speakers to class, they assign research, they allow and encourage students to use power point presentations, and are always well prepared with different activities for each lesson.

Quality teachers make you work hard and you don't even feel it. I guess they get to know you and understand you can be challenged, but it's more like you sense teachers know you can do the work.

Quality teachers know how to pace the work for everyone in the class. They don't make you wait for everyone else to finish; if you need more challenging work, they let you go ahead and advance with your work. When students need additional help, they take the time to explain things differently or offer tutoring before or after school. They use different ways of teaching regardless of the students' abilities.

Quality teachers don't get all bent out of shape when we have other activities going on like games, senior picture day, field trips, and dances. They just relax and teach without getting too uptight about schedule changes.

Quality teachers don't just teach from the book, they vary how they teach and they plan activities for each lesson. They are not boring at all.

Quality teachers understand how high school kids learn. They vary the way they teach, not just lecture. For example, our government teacher let us do research on lawyers. He had lawyers come talk to us and then we actually had a trial here to see why we should change the dress code.

The high school students described flexible teachers as those who demonstrate good organizational skills, have all materials prepared in advance, and plan appropriate and engaging activities to support all lessons. According to the high school students, flexible teachers understand the students' varied levels and learning styles and are able to use a variety of methods to effectively teach all of their students. These teachers plan engaging activities for the students, employ various teaching strategies, incorporate technology. The students further defined the characteristic flexible by describing teachers who are able to adjust their schedules to interruptions from the hectic schedules typical of high school students. They also suggest that flexible teachers offer tutoring outside of class and provide extra materials to assist students who are behind in their work.

4. Quality Teachers are Respectful.

The fourth characteristic of quality teachers perceived by the high school students was respectful. The students referred 22 times to this word or to the words phrases which supporting the major theme. These words/phrases include: fair, good disciplinarian, treats everyone the same, respectful of students' backgrounds, showing courtesy to all, ask not demand, respect our opinions, and treat us like human beings. The following six direct quotes suggest how high school students perceive *respectful* as a characteristic of quality teachers:

Quality teachers respect students, they ask, not demand. Respect is a two-way street, and quality teachers know it. They treat you fairly, and they earn our respect because they respect you and they teach you, which is what they're supposed to do. They also respect the students' cultural differences, they show people that come from different countries that they matter.

Quality teachers are aware that students come to school from different backgrounds, and they respect that. They treat everyone the same, with fairness and they treat students like human beings, not just a number, or another student they have to teach.

Quality teachers not only respect students, they teach in a way that makes you want to come to school, stay in school, and have hope you will graduate and be somebody. They are good at developing relationships with all students. They make us feel like we matter, and they do that by respecting us and respecting our opinions. Those teachers don't spend a lot of time disciplining kids, we know they respect us.

Quality teachers show respect to all kids no matter who they are and where they come from. They talk to you in respectful ways that make you feel like you're a good human being.

Yeah, respectful teachers are quality teachers. They have earned our respect because they respect us. They don't embarrass us or look down on us. They are fair, all the way.

Quality teachers respect us and also respect what we have to say in class. They don't allow other kids to disrespect your opinions either. They treat all kids the same.

High school students referred to quality teachers as those who display respect for each individual student. Respectful teachers, as perceived by the students, are democratic, fair, and impartial in how they treat all students. These teachers do not show favoritism and respect all students, their opinions, their backgrounds, and their families. High school students also conveyed that respectful teachers are even tempered and can understand the students' perspectives. The students suggested that when they felt respected by their teacher, they were more willing to participate in learning and felt like they were capable of succeeding in school and beyond. Respectful teachers, as perceived by the students, motivate students to learn, demonstrate understanding, kindness, and courtesy for all students and expect that the students treat one another with respect as well.

5. Quality Teachers are Caring.

Caring also emerged from the responses high school students gave to describe characteristics of quality teachers. The students' responses included 15 references to the characteristic caring and its associated words/phrases which include: dedicated, care about us all, understand, want to help students succeed, willing to help students, care about students as human beings, cares about us and knows when things are going on outside of school, sympathetic, listens, asks for our opinion, dedicated, the ones that motivate us to do our best, have a desire and passion for teaching, and help every student

equally and want them to achieve. The following student responses demonstrate the high school students' perception of a *caring* teacher:

> The most important characteristic of quality teacher is that they just care for the students. They show they care by making sure students do all their work, are prepared for college or work, and by listening to the students when they have something important to say. Teachers that really care about students as human beings are sympathetic, dedicated, honest and understanding.
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> They understand when you have problems outside of school, it's not just about learning school material, it's also learning about real life situations. Caring teachers know the difference and they help you work things out. Caring teachers show you in many ways that you are an individual that deserves the very best, and they also care about your family and what goes on inside and outside of school.
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> Caring teachers do many little things to show you they care. When one of the student's lost his parent, everyone pulled together to help pay for the funeral. They treat you like family. They also get after you if you disappoint them, just like a family member does, so you want to do right by the teachers that care for you as a person and then as a student.
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> Quality teachers care about students as individual, not just as another kid in their class. They connect with every single student.
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> Quality teachers care about preparing us for real life situations. They take the time to listen to us and give us advice about school, home, and relationships.
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> Quality teachers really care about what's going on with us every single day we are in class and even when we're out of school. They care about us, period.

According to high schools students, caring teachers are quality teachers who exhibit nurturing, patience, encouragement, and understanding and verbally express high expectations for all students. High school students emphatically indicated that caring teachers are very understanding of high school students' demanding schedules and they are willing to work with students so they can succeed. Furthermore, students conveyed that caring teachers are also good listeners who are non-judgmental and treat students in a humane and kind manner. Students perceived caring teachers as acutely aware of what goes on in the life of their students. They suggested that these teachers make an effort to be sympathetic and strive to accommodate each students' individual needs.

Quantitative Analysis of High School Students' Perceptions

Table 5 presents the number of times each characteristic was cited by high school students during the focus group interviews. The five major themes are listed by prevalence: 1) *fun*, which cited 63 times by the students, ranked as the most prevalent characteristic identified by high school students; followed by 2) *knowledgeable*, cited 46 times by students; 3) *flexible*, cited 32 times; 4) *respectful*, cited 22 times; and 5) *caring*, which cited 15 times, ranked as the least prevalent characteristics of quality teachers as perceived by high school students.

Table 5: High School Perceived Characteristics of Quality Teachers.

Characteristic	***Times cited***	***Percentage***	***Rank***
Fun	63	35.4 %	1
Knowledgeable	46	25.8 %	2
Flexible	32	18.0 %	3
Respectful	22	12.3 %	4
Caring	15	8.4 %	5

Note: the 155 total high school students interviewed provided 82 responses to the research question; contained within those responses were 178 total references to the major themes. Calculations for Table 3 were based on these 178 references..

Comparative Analysis of Students' Perceptions Across School Levels

A comparative analysis of student responses on the characteristics of quality teachers indicates that elementary, middle school, and high school students perceived three common characteristics of quality teachers. These include: 1) quality teachers are *fun*, 2) quality teachers are *caring*, and 3) quality teachers are *flexible*. Further data analysis indicates that middle school students also identified *relevant* as a characteristic of quality teachers. High school students perceived two additional characteristics of quality teachers: *knowledgeable* and *respectful*. Table 6 presents the commonality of characteristics identified among all three groups of students in the study.

Table 6: Common Characteristics Across Grade Levels

	Elementary School K–5	Middle School 6–8	High School 9–12
Fun	√	√	√
Caring	√	√	√
Flexible	√	√	√
Relevant		√	
Knowledgeable			√
Respectful			√

Summary of Chapter IV

This chapter presented in the first section information about the ten school districts included in the study. The district profile included general location, number of students, demographic information and number of participants. The second section presented and interpreted the findings of the study in the order of the questions which guided the study. The chapter concluded with a comparative analysis of the data contained in each subgroup to identify intersecting and salient themes. Chapter V presents a summary of the study and findings, propositions, and implications of the study.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary of the Study

This study focused on the perceptions of 448 K–12 students on the characteristics of quality teachers in high performing, mostly urban schools in ten public school districts. High performing schools were schools identified as such by the participating districts (though not each of the participating districts as a whole were considered high performing). These schools also met Adequate Yearly Progress [AYP], criteria mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2004 [NCLB]. The districts had a student enrollment that ranged from 10,000 students to 57,000 students. All districts in the study had a diverse ethnic student composition, and all ten districts had between 30% and 100% of students who qualified for free and reduced lunch.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What are the perceived characteristics of quality teachers according to elementary students?
2. What are the perceived characteristics of quality teachers according to middle school students?
3. What are the perceived characteristics of quality teachers according to high school students?

During the spring of 2006, these ten public school districts were visited and a total of 448 students from grades K–12 participated in this study. For each district students were randomly selected by their school principals, and were divided into three groups: elementary students (K–5), middle school students (6–8), and high school students (9–12). Focus group interviews were conducted with each group of students. The researcher worked with a team of assessors to conduct the focus group interviews. During the interviews, each group of students was presented with the question, "What are the characteristics of quality teachers?" (Explanation was provided by the team of assessors when necessary for the students to understand the question, most frequently for elementary students.) The students' responses were captured in written form by an administrative assistant of the team of assessors. Each member of the team of assessors reviewed the written notes for accuracy of recording. The researcher later analyzed the approved field notes recorded during the interviews to answer the research questions.

The researcher used grounded theory as the theoretical framework to analyze the data collected from the students. Three steps in the grounded theory of analytic process were employed: 1) open coding, 2) axial coding, and 3) selective coding. This method of extracting the major themes, or characteristics, from the written record of the students' responses during the focus group interviews are detailed in Chapter IV.

Summary of Findings

Guided by the research questions posed by the study, data were analyzed to identify the characteristics of quality teachers as perceived by elementary, middle school and high school students. A qualitative analysis allowed to identify emerging characteristics of quality teachers. A quantitative analysis yielded a degree of prevalence within the student responses. The themes are listed by degree of prevalence within students' responses.

Elementary school students' responses yielded three characteristics of quality teachers. These characteristics included: quality teachers are *fun,* quality teachers are *caring*, and quality teachers are *flexible* (in various teaching strategies).

Middle school students' responses provided four major characteristics of quality teachers: quality teachers are *fun*, quality teachers are *caring*, quality teachers are *flexible*, and quality teachers are those whose teaching is *relevant*.

High school students identified five major characteristics: quality teachers are *fun*, quality teachers are *knowledgeable*, quality teachers are *flexible*, quality teachers are *respectful*, and quality teachers are *caring*.

Summary of Comparative Analysis

The emergent characteristics from each subgroup were then compared to identify intersecting and salient themes. Commonalities across all grade levels were found in three of the six themes. Table 7 presents emergent themes for each subgroup as ranked by students.

Table 7: Intersecting and Salient Characteristics as Ranked by Students.

	Elementary School	***Middle School***	***High School***
Fun	1st	1st	1st
Caring	2nd	2nd	5th
Flexible	3rd	3rd	3rd
Relevant	-	4th	-
Knowledgeable	-	-	2nd
Respectful	-	-	4th

As table 7 indicates, quality teachers are *fun* was the characteristic that intersected all grade levels as the top ranked characteristic of quality teachers. Quality teachers are *caring* was the common characteristic between elementary and middle school students as the second ranked characteristic of quality teachers. High school students identified the salient theme of quality teachers are *knowledgeable* as the second ranked characteristic of

quality teachers. Quality teachers are *flexible* was the characteristic that intersected all grade levels as the third ranked characteristic of quality teachers. Middle school students identified the salient characteristic of quality teachers whose teaching is relevant. High school students also identified the salient characteristic of quality teachers respectful.

Emergent Characteristics and Existing Research

Each of the six major characteristics of quality teachers, which emerged from the focus group interviews—*fun, caring, flexible, relevant, knowledgeable, and respectful*—were compared to existing research and literature pertaining to traits of effective teachers. Descriptions and data pertaining to the stated themes which are available in current research and literature were isolated and cross referenced with the student-based descriptions of each identified characteristic. All six emergent characteristics are congruent with prior research. The only characteristic the students' identified which was not found in existing literature pertained to *flexible;* the students in every subgroup responded that quality teachers are able to adapt when class time interruptions occur. This trait was not found in current literature pertaining to flexibility as related to teachers.

The following is a discussion of the characteristics of quality teachers with regard to existing research on effective teachers.

Quality Teachers are Fun.

Fun emerged as a the most prevalent characteristic of quality teachers in all subgroups interviewed. Control Theory on motivation, by Glasser (1985 in Luckner, 2002) states that behavior is caused not by an outside stimulus, but by what a person wants most at any given time, and he contends that all behavior is intended to satisfy one of the following five internal needs: 1) To *survive*; 2) To *belong and be loved* by others; 3) To have *power and importance*; 4) To have *freedom and independence*; and 5) To have *fun* (p. 30). Glasser (1985) observes that the more students are able to fulfill their basic needs: to survive, to belong, to love, to gain power, and to have fun while they are in school, the more they will apply themselves to learning (Glasser in Luckner, 2002, p. 30). Glasser's inclusion of fun as a basic need why students fully supports and helps to explain the students' in all subgroups consistently refered to fun as a trait of quality teachers.

In a similar thread, Woolfork (1995 in Luckner, 2002) suggests that people feel most motivated to learn when they are curious, interested, and enjoy what they are learning— which are almost identical to students' explanations of why they equated fun teachers as quality teachers (p. 31). The students identified that when they were having fun, they were interested in the subject matter and enjoyed the experience of learning. Several students even further indicated that when they were having fun, they didn't even feel like they were learning. This notion is congruent with Luckner (2002), who proposes that teachers can insert fun into lesson plans to dissipate boredom and apathy; he states

"If you are willing to incorporate fun into your teaching, you will find that it provides a new set of tools for building rapport in the classroom, not only among students, but also between you and the students" (p.32). This correlates with the students' references to fun teachers being at ease with students and interacting socially with students.

The students' perception of having fun while learning is also supported by Prensky's (2002, p. 8) assertions about the importance of having fun while learning:

> … a brain enjoying itself is functioning more efficiently . . . When we enjoy learning; we learn better (Rose and Nicholl, 1996, p. 30) . . . Enjoyment and fun as part of the learning process are important when learning new tools since the learner is relaxed and motivated and therefore more willing to learn . . . The role that fun plays with regard to intrinsic motivation in education is twofold. First intrinsic motivation promotes the desire for recurrence of the experience . . . Secondly, fun can motivate learners to engage themselves in activities with which they can have little or no previous experience (Bisson and Luckner, 1996).

The relationship between intrinsic motivation and fun in the learning process is also described by Stronge (2002) and even further explains the students' identification of *fun* as a characteristic of quality teachers. Stronge states, "An effective teacher knows how to support intrinsically motivated students and seeks ways to provide extrinsic motivation to students who need it" (p.16). Furthermore, "Effective teachers have a good sense of humor and are willing to share jokes" (p. 17). If students experience fun while they are learning, they are more prone to remain engaged, and thus apply themselves more to the learning process.

Quality Teachers are Caring.

Caring was a student perceived characteristic of quality teachers in all subgroups. Glasser's (1990) Control Theory on motivation by Glasser (1990) includes "to *belong and be loved* by others" as one of five internal needs states (p. 25). He contends that the more students are able to fulfill their basic needs, the more they will apply themselves to learning (Glasser, 1985, p. 34). To feel cared for is closely related to feeling loved ("loves" was identified as an element of a caring teacher by the students), and therefore Glasser's theory supports the students' identification of *caring* as a characteristic of quality teachers.

Further, Stronge described caring as a broad term that may include attributes such as trust, patience, honesty, fairness, respect and two-way communication between teacher and student (Stronge, 2002, p. 14). The students' responses did not contain direct references to "trust" or "honesty," though overall their description of *caring* teachers remains consistent with Stronge's notion of caring. Stronge further contends that, "Particularly for elementary students, gentleness in a teacher is a sign of caring and an important element in perceived effectiveness" (2002, p. 14). This contention is fully supported by the data collected during the focus group interviews. Elementary students' references to *caring* represented 34.5 % of the total references to major themes; while middle school references to *caring* comprised 27.3 %, and high school references equaled 8.4 %. Caring did emerge as a major theme for each subgroup based on the students' responses; however the percentages indicate that, as Stronge claimed, the elementary students perceived *caring* to be of more importance than did the middle school or high

school students. Additionally, *gentle* only appeared as an associated word in the elementary subgroup.

The students' perception of caring as an integral element of quality teaching is congruent with existing research. As Noddings (1992, p.27) emphasized, "Caring is the very bedrock of all successful education." Teachers who espouse this belief, place students' needs at the center of instruction and strive to ensure all students are part of the instructional process. In Pajak's (2003) work, *Honoring Diverse Teaching Styles*, the author describes caring teachers as those who exhibit "tremendous passion" for their classrooms, for their students and for the subjects they teach: "Caring teachers consciously attend to the feeling-tone generated by human interaction in their classrooms and are tuned-in to the emotional needs of every student. They closely monitor the social and emotional dynamics of their classrooms to ensure that all students feel important and cared-for" (p.31).

The finding that students at all levels perceive caring as a trait of quality teachers supports Lumpkin's assertion, "When students know that their teachers genuinely care, they respond by exerting greater effort to reach their potential" (2007, p. 158); Lumpkin describes caring teachers as those who "nurture relationships with students through affirming students' efforts and talents. These teachers realize that learning is much more likely to occur when positive reinforcing comments outnumber critical comments" (2007, p.159). Lumpkin's ideas give ground to the students' (in every subgroup) identification of *caring* as a characteristic of quality teachers. The elementary students' responses

included “helps all students learn,” “nice,” and “kind;” the middle school students used “encouraging” and “talks nicely to students;” and the high school students claimed that *caring* teachers “motivate us to do our best.”

Quality Teachers are Flexible.

Flexible emerged as a major characteristic of quality teachers in each subgroup. Based on the students’ responses and the analytic process used to interpret their responses, two different description of a flexible teacher emerged—one described the teacher who incorporates various teaching strategies and activities to daily lessons; the second describes the teacher who is able to adjust to interruptions of class time and modify instruction according to students’ needs. The first trait is prevalent in the research pertaining to the characteristic flexible as related to teachers; however the second trait is not as apparent.

For instance, Stronge’s research claims that students of teachers who constantly plan, develop and “regularly integrate inquiry-based, hands-on learning activities, critical thinking skills, and assessment into daily lessons” out-perform their peers (2002, pp 42–49). Additionally, flexible teachers are described as those teachers who hold high expectations of themselves and their students, dedicate extra time to instructional preparation and reflection, maximize instructional time via effective classroom management and organization, enhance instruction by varying strategies, activities, and

assignments, and present content to students in a meaningful way that fosters understanding (Tucker & Stronge, 2005, pp. 104–107). These methods instruction are described by students in elementary, middle school, and high school in a range of responses. All subgroups provided references to teachers who are organized, plan ahead, and create an array of interesting activities to supplement the lessons, as well as to teachers who are willing to devote extra time to help students learn by offering tutoring.

The finding that quality teachers are flexible in their use of a variety of instructional methods is also congruent with research conducted by Haberman (1995) on "star teachers," which proposed that effective teachers were successful in engaging students by constantly seeking activities that elicit children's interest and effort, using various materials, objects, and equipment such as computers and information systems of all kinds to involve children, and utilizing events reported in the media to heighten students' interest (p. 19). Middle school and high school students' descriptions of teachers who incorporate technology into activities and lessons as quality teachers align with Haberman's claims. Haberman also lists additional activities which teachers can use to captivate children's interest: music, games, hands-on activities, weaving, creative writing, construction and filmmaking (p. 19). Several of the students in each subgroup referred to music, games, and hands-on activities directly, and alluded to other activities they did not directly describe.

Along the same line, Marzano, et. al. provide strategies that help students learn material: using graphic organizers, summarizing, note-taking, using cooperative learning

and setting-specific learning objectives with additional and timely feedback from teachers (2001, p. 59). As with Haberman, though students did not specifically name such activities, their descriptions of quality teachers employing varied learning activities to supplement lessons supports the strategies suggested by Marzano, et. al.

For the most part, the findings of this study are congruent with previous research. However, the study adds additional qualities of flexible teachers—these teachers are able to adjust when various school events and extracurricular activities interrupt class time, and these teachers do not become upset from interruptions and are able to help the students who are involved in extracurricular activities and students who miss school due to illness, etc., catch up with their peers.

Quality Teachers are Those Whose Teaching is Relevant.

Findings suggest that *relevant* is a characteristic of quality teachers perceived by middle school students. Students expressed the importance of teachers focusing on information the students would need in the "real world," and they suggested that they were more interested in and engaged when their teachers were able to relate the material they were learning to the ways the information would be used in the students' lives outside of school. Previous research makes similar claims. For instance, Haberman (1995) describes teachers who see the achievement of specific learning objectives connected with future employment as their major purpose, so they teach relevant material

that students can use in the future. Along a similar thread, Stronge discusses effective teachers who, in their planning and preparation for instruction, recognize the importance of linking instruction to real life (2002, pp. 37–39).

Additionally, Stronge states that effective teachers "stress the importance of higher mental processes, such as problem solving techniques, analytical thinking skills, and creativity. These skills enable students to relate their learning to real-life situations and incorporate concepts into their long-term memory" (2002, p. 44). A number of the students interviewed by this study described problem-solving situations their teachers created in which it was the students' job to create a solution; for example, one middle school student said of his quality teacher, "when we were learning about perimeter and area, she had us work in groups to figure out how much carpet we would need to carpet the entire eighth grade hall. Stuff like that will be useful when we get out of school."

Stronge further refers to teachers who are relevant in the material they teach. He purports that students' achievement rates improve "when the focus of instruction is on meaningful conceptualization, especially when it emphasizes their own knowledge of the world" (2002, p. 44). Students also claimed they were more interested and better able to remember material when it was pertinent to their lives. Haberman also touches on the significance of students' learning being relevant to their "present lives" but contends that is only possible when teachers "know sufficient subject matter to connect it with children's daily lives and real problems" (1995, p. 32). The students likewise described their perception that teachers who are capable of relating their school work to their real lives are quality teachers who enable them to succeed in school and beyond.

Quality Teachers are Knowledgeable.

The characteristic k*nowledgeable* as perceived by the high school students participating in this study is consistent with research and policy pertaining to traits of effective teachers. The policy guidance of Title II, Part A, states its main purpose is to ensure that all students have effective teachers; effective is used to describe teachers with the subject matter knowledge and teaching skills necessary to help all children achieve academic standards, regardless of individual learning styles and needs (Title II, Part A, 2004). A knowledgeable teacher is further defined as one who is certified to teach, has earned a bachelor's degree, has received formal training in pedagogy and teaching methods, has content mastery in the subject he or she teaches, and one who continues his/her professional development (NBPTS, 2000).

Other accounts of knowledgeable are contained in current literature. Stronge states that "Strong content knowledge consistently has been identified as an essential element among those who study effective teaching" (2002, p. 8). He then explains that "Teachers with subject matter knowledge are better able to go beyond the basic textbook content and involve students in meaningful discussions and student-directed activities. Some researchers argue that the definition of subject matter expertise must include the ability to convey and teach the content to others, as well as having an acute awareness of the concepts and ideas being taught. Additionally, a strong background in content and subject matter assist teachers in planning and organizing lessons that are sequential and interactive" (2002, p.8).

Stronge's report illuminates the high school students' descriptions of quality teachers as they relate to the characteristic knowledgeable. The students referred to teachers who have solid command of the subject they teach, who "know it by heart," and demonstrate passion and enthusiasm for their subject. The students perceived that these teachers are able to convey their knowledge and passion and thus inspire their students to want to learn. The students further suggested that knowledgeable teachers deliver instruction that feels meaningful and relevant and holds the students' interest.

Quality Teachers are Respectful.

Findings suggest that high school students perceive that quality teachers are r*espectful*. Stronge states, "Some of the key qualities of effective teachers include teachers who are caring, fair and respectful" (2005, p.2). Fair was one of the words the high school students used in their description of respectful teachers. Stronge also suggests that effective teachers emphasize, model, and practice "respect and understanding" as well as "fairness regarding race, cultural background, and gender," and therefore are able to establish rapport and credibility with their students; he further indicates that respect and equity are perceived by students to be "prerequisites of effective teachers" (Stronge, 2002, p. 16). The high school students in this study echo Stronge in their description of quality teachers as those who don't show favoritism, who treat their students the same, regardless of their background or race, and who show

courtesy to all of their students. The students in this study also stated that quality teachers expect the students to treat one another with respect as well.

The previously discussed behaviors of respectful teachers result in a "classroom environment [that] can provide a climate more conducive to learning and achievement" (Dodd, 2000, p. 39). This also relates to Glasser's theory that the more students' basic needs are fulfilled, the more they will apply themselves to learning (1985, p. 34). If being respected contributes to one's need to have power and importance, it would be expected that a respectful classroom environment would lend to higher levels of learning and achievement. The students certainly considered respectfulness as an important trait of an effective teacher. Additionally, Rudduck, et al. (1996) outline six principles necessary to foster "positive conditions of learning," of which "respect for students," "fairness to all students," and "social support and security" are included (p. 47).

Propositions and Findings

Based on the nature of this study and the findings, the following propositions are advanced:

Proposition 1

Regardless of location, size of school district, socio-economic status, or degree of diversity in the school districts, students of each grade level equally value three characteristics that constitute quality teachers: 1) quality teachers are *fun*; 2) quality

teachers are *caring*: and 3) quality teachers are *flexible* in the use of various teaching strategies as well as *flexible* in routine and scheduling.

Proposition 2

Middle school students highly value teachers whose teaching is *relevant,* and perceive this as an additional characteristic of quality teachers.

Proposition 3

High school students highly value two additional characteristics of quality teachers, teachers who are *knowledgeable* and *respectful,* and perceive these as traits of quality teachers. High school students, in the discussion of quality teachers, place a higher emphasis on teachers who are *knowledgeable* than students at all other levels.

Implications for Practice

1. School leaders interested in hiring high quality teachers may consider the student-perceived characteristics of quality teachers: (fun, caring, flexible, relevant, knowledgeable, and respectful), for recruiting, selecting, and retaining teachers.

2. Colleges and universities in search of research-based information about quality teachers may take into account the characteristics identified by this study in order

to design and develop teacher preparation programs and curricula that includes information on what students perceive are the characteristics of quality teachers.

3. School districts and staff development specialists may incorporate the findings of this study in their design of training materials and workshops so as to enhance teachers' skills as well as to inform teachers of student-perceived characteristics of quality teachers.

4. Teachers may embrace the information to self-assess their skills and improve their performance by seeking additional training, investing in their own growth and development, and by requesting the types of professional development they need from their school districts.

5. Parents may use the information about quality teachers' attributes to request teachers for their children, teachers who exhibit the student-perceived characteristics of quality teachers.

Implications for Future Research

According to Stronge, "One of the arguments for including students as evaluators is that they are the primary consumers of the teacher's services" (Stronge, 2006, p. 135). This study was conducted in order to include the student perspective and illuminate the student voice as pertaining to characteristics of quality teachers. However, the findings

of this study may not be generalized to school districts beyond those which were part of the Stupski Foundation's district alliance group. Further, due to the fact that interviews were not recorded, the accuracy of the findings of this study are limited to the interpretation of the team of assessors who recorded the students' responses. Finally, since this study focused on the perceptions of the students' only, additional research is needed to further explore the characteristics of quality teachers. For example, researchers could investigate teachers' perception of the characteristics of quality teachers and compare these with their own student perception. Similarly, studies could focus on the school leaders' perceptions.

Additional research is also needed to identify student perceived characteristics with a larger population of students. A similar study could be conducted to allow for sub-group analysis by ethnicity, gender, economic status, age/specific grade level, geographical location, and other various school settings and contexts. Lastly, additional research could be done on the possible relationships between two or more characteristics identified by students. For example a study could be conducted to determine if the students perceive a relationship between knowledgeable and respectful, or between knowledgeable and relevant, and between caring and respectful. The student voice belongs in the discourse of what constitutes a quality teacher because they are key players of the teaching and learning process.

Summary of Chapter V

This study of student-perceived characteristics of quality teachers used focus group interviews to elicit the perceptions of 448 students in 10 high performing, most urban, public school districts. The application of the grounded theory method of analyzation, produced six major themes, or characteristics of quality teachers. These included: 1) fun, 2) caring, 3) flexible, 4) relevant, 5) knowledgeable, and 6) respectful. Comparative analysis isolated three themes which intersected in each subgroup: 1) fun, 2) caring, and 3) flexible. The student-perceived characteristics of quality teachers were compared with existing literature, and the two were found to be consistent. The results of this study can: inform teacher preparation curricula; assist school districts' in recruiting, selection practices, and development of teachers; guide policy makers; inspire teachers to improve teaching and ensure educational excellence for all students; and inform parents and students.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The operational definitions of the following terms used in this study are:

Academic Progress—the achievement in reading and mathematics on state-mandated tests showing a positive trend—The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (CGCS, 2006).

Academic Success—the achievement of the minimum expectations of state standards (NCLB, 2001).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)—an individual state's measure of the minimum level of academic improvement that schools and districts must achieve each year (NCLB, 2001).

African American (AA)—a non-Hispanic person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (TEA, 2005a).

Characteristic—noun, a distinguishing feature or quality (Dictionary.com, 2008).

Characteristics of Quality Teachers—a term used by researchers to interview students on the attributes of quality teachers.

Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS)—a coalition of 66 of the nation's largest urban public school systems. Founded in 1956 and incorporated in 1961, the Council promotes urban education through legislation, research, media relations, instruction, etc. (CGCS, 2006, About the Council page).

Economically Disadvantaged (ED)—a term that describes **s**tudents who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch or other public assistance (TEA, 2004c).

English Language Learner (ELL)—a student whose first language is not English and who is in the process of learning English (TEA, 2004c).

High Performing School— as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act, a school that meets or exceeds Adequate Yearly Progress (APY), (NCLB).

Highly Qualified Teacher—as defined by the No Child Left Behind Act**,** a teacher who: has obtained full state certification (including alternative certification) or has passed the state teacher licensing exam; and holds a license to teach in the state; and has not had certification or licensure requirements waived on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis (NCLB).

Hispanic—a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American culture or origin, or a person of any other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race (TEA, 2005a).

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—also known as "the Nation's Report Card"—the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of what students in the United States know and can do in reading, mathematics, science, writing, U.S. History, civics, geography, and the arts.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)—Public law 107–110:197th Congress signed into effect January 8, 2002. The purpose of the act is to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so no child is left behind (No Child Left Behind, 2006).

Quality Teachers—a term used for teachers whose students are academically successful, as defined by the No Child Left behind Accountability System (NCLB, 2001).

Reform—Major change leading to a restructuring of a core process, program, and/or procedures (Hanson, 1995, p.2).

Texas Education Agency (TEA)—TEA is a branch of the state government of Texas which oversees public primary and secondary education as well as charter schools in the state of Texas.

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